

Cabinet Office Director of Government Communications joins Pen & Sword Club



ALEX AIKEN, Executive Director of Government Communications in the Cabinet Office has accepted an invitation from the Pen & Sword Club to become a Vice President. He joins an elite list that includes a Rear Admiral, two Lieutenant Generals, three Major Generals, an Air Chief Marshal, an Air Marshal and an Air Vice Marshal plus a former Director General of the Central Office of Information, who also served as Chief of Public Relations in the Ministry of Defence.

Our VIP supporters also include communications leaders who have served in the Foreign Office and the Home Office, and at the Strategic HQ of Allied Powers Europe. Two well-known journalists from the BBC and The Times also add to our reputation as a repository of communications knowledge and practise that has enabled the Club to attract members from throughout the profession.

Said Alex: "I'm delighted to accept the post of Honorary Vice President and look forward to Pen and Sword events in the future. I have a huge

respect for member of the group, its role and the power of effective communication as a military tool."

Club President Hugh Colver in welcoming Alex, said: Your appointment is a very popular step among our members, cements our relationship with current practitioners at the heart of government and helps to explode the idea that we are all simply old and bold!"

Alex was appointed to his Cabinet Office role in December 2012 and has been responsible for creating the Government Communications Service and developing cross-government campaigns. Between 2000 and 2012 he was Director of Communications and Strategy for Westminster City Council, leading the policy, member services and communications teams. He served as part of the group that oversaw the implementation of the Tri-Borough Shared Services programme and established the Westco Communications Consultancy which works for public and private sector clients around the UK.

He has been National Secretary of LGcommunications and Vice Chairman of the Public Relations Consultants Association Council. He is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA).

Before joining Westminster, he worked in Parliament and for Conservative Central Office, leading the party's Campaigns Unit and the Press Office. He has trained and advised politicians and officials in countries and states around the world in the practice of government and communications.

The Executive Director for Government Communications is responsible for government communication strategy, managing the combined Prime Minister's Office and Cabinet Office communications team and serves as Head of Profession for the Government Communications Service. He is also responsible for the effectiveness and efficiency of government communications through the approval of marketing spending and the procurement of external contracts.

POOR COMMUNICATIONS CAN KILL!

Coronavirus presents Government with a classic crisis

THE CORONAVIRUS has presented Government with a classic crisis in which it has been required to tune up its communications strategies, tactics and methodologies in order to inform on the one hand and influence behaviour on the other. It has become a cliché to say how challenging this is in an age of social media and hysterical tv and press media. It is nonetheless fair to say that it is pretty well as difficult as it gets, writes Hugh Colver, President of the Pen & Sword Club.

A pandemic in some respects is the ultimate nightmare scenario because it not only affects every part of the nation's life and creeps remorselessly into the very fabric of all that goes to make a society and an economy but it features a life and death struggle against an unseen and insidious enemy that hits us psychologically as well as physically. Its effects go well beyond the hospital bed or life support unit.

In this situation, those of us Pen and Sworders who have lived and breathed communications – crisis or otherwise – all our working lives know how difficult it is for those with the responsibility to get it right, remembering of course that there will be as many definitions of “right” in this context as there are fish in the sea.



Armchair strategists and pundits have caused me more than a few problems in the past so I hesitate to join their number, but there have been one or two moments over the past months when I have found myself saying “Why on earth did they approach it in that way?” Or “Why is there not a better understanding in some quarters of the demands of issues management and communication?” I was triggered to burst into print on the morning of Monday, 21 September, when as I switched on my tv to the BBC I was heard to shout “At last!”.

Sir Patrick Vallance, the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, and Professor Chris Witty, the Chief Medical Adviser, sat behind a desk and gave to camera with the aid of slides a factual account of where we were with this wretched virus at that moment, where the risks lay in the future and why we needed to take the steps that it was for Ministers to decide upon and lay before us (and of course Parliament – but that's a whole different piece).

- *There were several key points about this moment, which I believe to be hugely significant and which I trust was staged in this way as a result of careful consideration and planning. One of the most important aspects of this briefing was that it was not a press conference.*

I spent my entire communications career wondering why it was that all around me were obsessed with the media. Any organisation in any situation but especially in a crisis has multiple audiences it needs to reach. The media isn't even one of them. Otherwise why are they called the media? From a communicator's viewpoint the media represent merely one medium through which they need to communicate to their audiences.

Since a vast proportion of the audience reads, listens and watches the media they are of course very important. And because of that, and because it is an easy trap to fall into, the media becomes THE audience.

The Government's Coronavirus press conferences which used to happen daily were just that. Press conferences to which the wider audience tuned in. They were headed up by the Prime Minister or one of his Ministers supported by the likes of Vallance, Whitty and others. So, we had Ministers delivering facts and figures and words about measures they wanted people to take and then the session descended into the media's extraordinarily poor questioning, point scoring, the seeking of party political divisions and the general bear baiting which the press so enjoy.

It was pretty painful for the Ministers and pretty painful to watch. But more important the vital Government communications messages were literally lost in the noise. Adding questions from the public failed to improve it much because by then the damage to the messages had been done.



In my experience, Ministers are not the people to give factual briefings or give directions to the public. The psychology is wrong, and politicians operate in a world that does not lend itself to that kind of environment. Boris Johnson is a very particular case in point. Because of his personal style and his demeanour and tone he is not the person to deliver facts and figures and earnest advice or instruction. The necessary content has little to do with the political rhetoric and associated charisma for which our PM is exceptionally well suited. For the numbers and the directions, you need somebody else and you need a different tone and demeanour to be effective.

The people of this country – especially when they were confined to their homes in the long and tedious lockdown – needed a daily briefing on what was happening with the virus, what its effects were, how it could be countered, what measures the Government was putting in place, what guidance and instructions were being issued, what action people should take, who they should call in certain circumstances etc, etc, etc. They also needed reassurance that those in charge knew what they were doing, understood the science and the measures needed and were able to offer convincing expert advice in a pragmatic down to earth manner.

- No rhetoric, no party politics, no glossing of the facts or the situation and no sense that unpalatable truths might be skated over. At least as important - no scaremongering, no doom prophecies and no issues left hanging in the air in a cloud of uncertainty.

These daily briefings would not have been press conferences. Why do the public want to watch press conferences? I have never advocated live or otherwise televised press conferences. They are meetings between the organisation concerned and the media. Nothing more.

It is my view that the daily briefings should have been formatted differently – the 21 September model was OK – with no Q and A and no sense of it being for the media. Judging by the audience figures for those early press conferences the briefings conducted in this way would have grabbed a big and important audience who would have had the facts, the guidance and the instructions and felt more confident about what to do and what not to do – and perhaps more confidence in what was being done on their behalf to sort the problems and address the issues.

The BBC, as the public broadcaster, should have put aside a slot every day for this briefing which would probably have been shown by all the other channels and had a good chance, with perhaps a repeat later in the day, of reaching a significant percentage of the target audience in one way or another.

Oh, but what about scrutiny? What about questioning? What about facing Government with the awkward questions? I hear these questions and they are of course completely valid. Press conferences and briefings would still take place, but they would be behind closed doors and not filmed and not recorded. Ministers and, as appropriate, officials could be questioned for as long and as deeply as the media wanted. TV and radio interviews would be given – indeed Ministers should spend (as they are doing) huge amounts of time touring the studios and being interrogated as hard as anybody likes.

- *That is all fine. But please, as on 21 September, give the ultimate audience the straight facts directly into their homes and offices. Otherwise they will end up confused, think they are receiving mixed messages and have a sense that the “truth” and the “facts” are somehow unattainable. That confusion has been created by the “noise” and that noise and the confusion it brings undermines confidence, reduces adherence to rules, plants uncertainty and spreads the virus. Poor communications is a killer. I exaggerate not.*

In terms of handling the politics of all this there is a thing called Parliament. That is also televised. And of course, there are numerous opportunities for the media to deal with the politics in interviews, panel discussions and the like. The role of Parliament and the responsibilities of opposition in a crisis are subjects for other articles but also of course important.

Apart from the daily briefing on tv there is of course social media which has been used extensively, advertising, direct mail – all the usual stuff of communications. However, it was and is fundamental that the Government talks to its audience directly by whatever means.

In the previous Scribblings there was mention of another matter on which I hope the Government is not about to make what I would regard as a mistake. There is an advertisement out there for a Downing Street spokesman who – like the White House it is suggested – would give televised media briefings. So long as that is entirely separate – in the context of Covid-19 – to the daily briefings I discuss above then that is fine by me and probably something we should have moved to some time ago.

- *However, it will apparently be a Conservative Party job and the individual who lands this job – who will be worth a darn sight more than the £100,000 per annum apparently on offer – will therefore be representing a Conservative Party view and have the ability to respond directly to Opposition attacks and advocate the Government's policies from a party political point of view. This is a mistake.*

I have been somewhat alarmed when I have mentioned this to a number of people that they do not get my point. “But this is a Conservative Government”, they say. “What's the problem? Surely that is obviously what Boris Johnson would wish to do.”

There is a fundamental point here that is very important for our constitution and way of governing. We operate a Parliamentary democracy in which political parties compete for the votes of the electorate. A majority in Parliament for one party or another, or the ability to coalesce with another party in Parliament to form a majority or even minority Government, produces the ability to put a leader as Prime Minister into 10 Downing Street and Ministers in the departments. That political party or political parties have now formed an administration which becomes the Government.

The civil service will serve that Government regardless of its political colour or make up and it will promote its policies as those of the Government without fear or favour. The political parties continue to have a political life of their own but those in Government should behave and speak as the Government.

Successive Press Secretaries at Downing Street have been officials of Government. All chiefs of communications in Government departments have been spokesmen or women for Government.

A Downing Street spokesman – on or off the record, on or off camera – should be an official of the Government. He or she can promote and defend the policies and activities of Government robustly (witness my old boss and friend Sir Bernard Ingham under Margaret Thatcher).

As soon as the spokesman is a party animal and seen as such he or she does not carry the authority of

Government, will not be trusted by the civil service and will be forced to attack in an overtly political manner the policies and activities of opposition parties – and fend off their attacks. The media will treat that person as a party animal too, of course. The press briefings will descend into

political argument and irrelevance – and by the way the opposition parties will say that the “Government” has taken advantage of its voice as Government to gain media time on the falsehood of speaking for Government.



So, my message to Downing Street is clear – yes Prime Minister have a spokesman, give ministers and yourself more time to do the job rather than briefing media for hours every day but please do not make the mistake of having this individual as a party appointee

Hugh Colver's background spans industry, government, politics and media and he has a wealth of experience in issues handling, relationship management, crisis management, contingency planning, corporate communications, public affairs and business development. Hugh's career included senior communications appointments in both the public and private sectors, and he has continued involvement in projects ranging from defence, security, aerospace, telecommunications, food and drink, electronic payment systems and land development to mediation in family trust and charity matters.

As a spokesman and adviser, he served two UK Prime Ministers, four Secretaries of State for Defence, two Secretaries of State for Employment, two FTSE 100 Chairmen, two FTSE 100 Chief Executives, and a Metropolitan Police Commissioner.

He headed the Ministry of Defence's corporate communications organisation, was Director of Communications for BAE Systems plc with a seat on the company's Executive Committee, was Director of Communications for the Conservative Party and Director of Public Affairs for British Aerospace Defence with a seat on the Board.

Hugh began his career as a journalist and was a staffer on the Financial Times before taking that experience to the Ministry of Defence and then to 10 Downing Street where he advised Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher throughout the Falklands Conflict. He then went to the Department of Employment to help Norman Tebbit, the then Secretary of State, push through the legislation which transformed industrial relations in the UK. After that he became Deputy Director of Information for the Metropolitan Police at Scotland Yard and an adviser to Sir Kenneth Newman, before returning to the MoD.

Hugh became Chief of Public Relations at the Ministry of Defence in 1987. As well as being the department's chief spokesman, and Press Secretary to successive Secretaries of State, he was involved in National and NATO contingency planning for war and conflict, particularly in

the context of public presentation and media issues. He put these plans into effect for the Gulf War of 1991 and was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in the Gulf War Honours List of 1992.

Hugh became Director of Communications for the Conservative Party in 1995 and acted as Political Press Secretary to Prime Minister John Major.

Between the MoD and Conservative Party jobs he joined the Board of British Aerospace Defence as Public Affairs Director. Then, in 2000, following the British Aerospace/Marconi Electronic Systems merger, Hugh became Group Communications Director for the FTSE 100 company BAE SYSTEMS plc and was responsible for corporate communications as a member of the Group Executive. In this role he developed the image and brand of the newly merged entity and initiated a number of positioning campaigns as the company presented a new face to the world. In addition, he was the company's principal interface with the media at corporate level, managed the communications function across the company and was responsible for issues management.

He was Honorary Colonel of the Media Operations Group (Volunteers) in the Territorial Army from 2001 to 2006 and Chairman of the Reform Club in 2012. Hugh is President of the Pen and Sword Club, serves on the Steering Committee of the Conservative Alumni, and is a member of the RUSI Acquisition Forum, and an Honorary Freeman in the Company of Communicators.

He is a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society (FRAeS) and a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (FRSA). He has extensive tv and radio broadcasting experience.



Leaks, Peeks and Sneaks – and a public weariness of bungling news management

LEAKS HAVE SEEMINGLY BECOME an indispensable part of 21st century journalism. Indeed, many would claim the practice has been around for a long time. But they also pose problems in terms of ethics and in maintaining public confidence in the veracity of our media, government and political institutions. A quick Google search will reveal many a learned paper about the growing stream of leaks, peeks and sneaks.

What concerns me though is the distrust that is fostered by the abuse of the information system, some of the bungling attempts at news management plus the public perception of bias in journalism as evidenced by the spate of criticism of the BBC, writes Editor Mike Peters, pictured below on a recent visit to his first newspaper in Mid Wales.

Without whistle blowers and leakers then Government and institutions cannot be held to account is the mantra of the moment. Is that true? Or are we now living in a world so full of mis/dis information that the way to promote opinion or bring a personal viewpoint to the fore is to break trust and publish and be damned. Yes, we are all aware that various news outlets follow a political line but in general the mainstream media in the United Kingdom is about as partisan as we can tolerate.



The audience for news in these pandemic times is not, unexpectedly, massive. Three million anxious people tuning in to an hour-long media-thon – I would not deign to describe them as press conferences - each evening is worth a hard, professional look at how to keep the public in the picture. With the advent of Wiki-leaks and a social media that knows no bounds in what is revealed, or alleged, professional communicators should strengthen their defences and, more than ever, must be included in management decision making.

Whether for political, military, industrial or just plain malicious reasons, even revenge, leaks are undoubtedly with us to stay. But do they add real knowledge especially to the current buzz around the future UK Integrated Defence Review. So many of these drips and splashes are now into the realms of the predicable, Moves, counter moves and sometimes plain embarrassing political and journalistic skirmishing to create news are a turn-off. How many times have my defence-oriented colleagues groaned 'here we go again'

It all started in August with a story that the Ministry of Defence was thinking that it no longer had a use for the Royal Marines Commandos. The next rumour was that the Ministry no longer needs the Queen of the Battlefield, the main battle tank. And, along with the Challenger, the Warrior armoured fighting vehicles were said to be ripe for the scrap heap. Then quick on the heels of that claim came the suggestion that the F35 is too expensive and the order will be slashed. And finally, amid a plethora of rumours about other kit and people, the suggestion that the Royal Navy's anti-submarine capability will be drastically reduced.

- There will be many in the media who will disagree. The leak, especially if it is allegedly an exclusive one, has become bread and butter to some. But the leaks, no matter the source, and opinion-based stories seem to be taking over in some quarters. Perhaps that is why there is room to start another new independent radio station that says it will report facts and eliminate the trend of opinionated reporting.

We should not be surprised that the leak is still so popular among publishers because it feeds the machine that wants to create rather than report news. Being first is the great cry and the added cache of, apparently, being exclusive is a siren song.

Along with leaks, of course, come peeks at documents - usually drafts of some government or other policy paper that reveals unexpected and controversial information. The drafts are often clearly marked as drafts and are probably one of a number commissioned to examine in depth the possibilities, probabilities and consequences of several courses of action. Without such examination of ideas and proposals there can be no calculated decisions. So, why feign surprise when one of probably a dozen documents assessing a project, is leaked by someone with a vested interest?

And looking at these stories we need to examine the sneaks. Who are the people who let the information slip: was it deliberate or was it accidental. Was the sneak acting under orders from within government or the ministry, is it from a genuine whistle-blower, or someone nursing a grievance. Whatever let us think carefully about this method of communication.

Scribblings takes the opportunity, this month to look at some of the many column inches written on the subject of leaks in recent weeks. Indeed, a piece from the BBC from a few years back is worth the read. Especially so as the Corporation continues to languish in the doldrums and appears to have lost a lot of friends.

Uncharted and troubled waters ahead ...

Scribblings makes no excuses for re-publishing this sage advice from a Scribblings story written by Ken Johnston as he retired as the Ministry of Defence's Chief Press Officer in Northern Ireland a few years ago. An experienced Belfast Telegraph journalist immersed in the Troubles; Ken's predictions look to be coming true.

Ken Johnston, Head of PR at HQ Northern Ireland retires and gives his view on the rise of multi-layered communications - and sends a message to wet behind the ears advisers – get used to a Celtic version of Anglo-Saxon phraseology.

I HAVE BEEN PRIVILEGED, writes Ken, to have worked in media and across media operations over what can only be described as the most incredible period of changes and advances in technology and delivery. However, given the discontent being aired in all quarters you could be forgiven for thinking relationships are at an all-time low.

There is no doubt we are sailing in largely uncharted and troubled waters - but despite mutinous conversations we are fortunate to have some very good and experienced hands across MOD to hold the tiller firm as we move into the unknown. There are charts emerging – the development and engagement of Modern Communications (MCOM) across Government, the rewriting and realignment of information campaigns by partners and allies, the evolving and emerging audiences and a media that is unable to gauge where its future lies.

We are in the bailiwick now of multi-layered communications which assault with unqualified speculation and comment - which without sensible editorial control and can too easily drive public opinions and temperatures. But are we losing the battle? No.

- *Despite misinterpretations in our own chains of command and a growing gap between strategic intent and tactical engagement we will sail through as adherence to the basic principles of crisis communications take us away from the disaster zone towards development of the opportunities that are emerging.*

But there are a number of lessons to be remembered and reinforced - that being the creditable source of information relies heavily on protecting that hard-won credibility - that countering misinformation in a multi layered media situation requires alert and immediate engagement - that easing the pressure of concerns requires acknowledgement weighing more than ourselves. I've seen attempts to re-design the wheel more times that I can remember but it still has to be round and the axle still needs to be greased.

We have a responsibility to brief traditional media, but we also have a responsibility to protect capabilities and tactics. We have a responsibility to spend wisely the diminished public purse and inevitably with pressure to develop our cyber engagement the imbalance is going to cause concern amongst traditionalists.



And the media have their responsibilities. They are intelligent professionals who have every right to ask and who have every right to be told when we can tell them something and why we cannot tell them something. With their rights to ask to come also their rights to understand and this doesn't include a right to be spoon fed - they are past that stage of growth.

When I started on this side of the fence one my first tasks were to look at and develop terminology to counter the media use in Europe and USA of terms such as guerrilla and freedom fighter when dealing with NI violence - today we have just completed a new lexicon to differentiate between residual terrorism in Northern Ireland and middle eastern driven terrorism.

This is work undertaken in partnership with the other agencies who are also being driven into this "new world". The MET made effective use of both traditional media and new media when dealing with the attacks at Westminster and London Bridge and we will also see effective use in due course.

- *Until then, apologies to those wet-behind-the-ears cubs who have tried to tell me the way things should be done in line with their interpretation - they'll have to get used to a Celtic version of Anglo-Saxon phraseology.*

We will sail to quiet times but until then we need to make sure yet once again that long handled screwdrivers are put out of the way - that we learn to properly understand and coordinate with crisis communications principles across the many layers and that we deal creditably with traditional media in a professional manner where the demarcation lines are firmly held and clearly marked out why.

The Pen & Sword Club Flourishes

Thanks are due this month to the Pen & Sword Club's webmaster. Major Peter Griffiths, pictured right, is nowadays tucked away in retirement in the Welsh Hills but he has found time to revamp the club pages. These now contain our revised aims and membership conditions and lists, in full, our remarkable collection of Vice Presidents and the full club membership. This should be completed very soon. Pete has patiently recovered from cyber space the lost back copies of the club's journals, The NetWorker and Scratchings from The Pen, and these are to be uploaded alongside editions of Scribblings.



Covid 19 continues to impact the club's activities and we will have to wait some time before considering re-starting our monthly London lunches. In the meantime, the central team continues to contact potential speakers and there is hope for a well-balanced programme in the new year.

Club membership continues to grow:

- Our first member in Switzerland joined us in August. Colin Farmer, a former Ministry of Defence Information Officer, based with 1 Division in West Germany, and now exercising some of his journalistic and linguistic skills in the Alpine region sends greetings to those who once worked in British Army of the Rhine.
- Our light blue ranks increased with the membership of Wing Commander William (Bill) Simpson. Bill is a military historian and author and the chief executive of an internet/social media company. His erudite comments on military matters are found across social media.
- The Irish Defence Forces provided its first candidate for the Pen & Sword Club in August with Wayne Fitzgerald, Editor of the Irish Forces newspaper moving on after nine years in the post to complete his military career as a media operations specialist with the Army Air Corps. His book, Shadow Warriors, is featured in our Book Review Section

- And in Northern Ireland the club has recruited retired Ministry of Defence Chief Press Officer Ken Johnston. Ken is a former Belfast Telegraph journalist and has travelled world-wide in his civil service roles.
- Also welcomed and bringing a wealth of academic experience in information ops matters is Paul Ellis, Paul is Managing Director of i3Gen, a specialist consultancy that brings together Business Marketing with Military Strategic Communications and Information Operations.
- The Director of Communications at South East Reserve Forces Association, Lewis Norwood and his comms colleague Liam O'Loughlin have joined. Both work alongside long-term member, the Chief Executive, Colonel Patrick Crowley.
- A regular at Club lunches, Matthew West, a Freeman of the City of London, joined in September. Matthew is an Associate of the Quiller Consultancy and a founding Director of CMIAnalytics, specialists in media evaluation. His membership strengthens the club's affiliation to the Livery Company of Communicators.

The Pen & Sword Club is affiliated to the Company of Communicators and is in discussion about a closer relationship. We hope many of the Liverymen with military connections and experience will be joining us in the coming year.



Andrew Neil will lead new rolling news channel to rival BBC and Sky

By Nicole Conner, Daily Mail Sept 25 2020

ANDREW Neil will lead new 24-hour news channel to rival BBC and Sky aiming to reach those who feel 'underserved and unheard' by the media. The broadcaster will be the face and chairman of GB News, signalling the end of his relationship with the BBC, where he has been one of the most respected political interviewers.

Plans are in place for 'Britain's news channel', aimed at those who feel 'underserved and unheard by their media', to launch early next year. The broadcaster will be the face and chairman of GB News, signalling the end of his relationship with the BBC. The channel could shake up the TV news landscape, currently dominated by Sky News and BBC News.



As well as being appointed chairman, broadcaster and former Sunday Times editor Neil, 71, will host a flagship evening programme in primetime. This will lead the programming line-up. He said: 'GB News is the most exciting thing to happen in British television news for more than 20 years. We will champion robust, balanced debate and a range of perspectives on the issues that affect everyone in the UK, not just those living in the London area.'

Neil, best known for The Andrew Neil Show, as well as This Week and Daily Politics on the BBC, added: 'We've seen a huge gap in the market for a new form of television news. 'GB News is aimed at the vast number of British people who feel underserved and unheard by their media.'

He wrote on Twitter that it is 'with heavy heart I announce I will be leaving the BBC'.

The BBC confirmed this summer that Neil's self-titled show would not return to TV screens after it came off air during the pandemic. It said at the time it was in discussions about a new interview series with Neil. Political interviewer and publisher Neil recently dismissed speculation that he was in the running to be the next BBC chairman, saying on Twitter that he has 'no interest in the job'.

- At a time when the BBC and commercial media companies are cutting jobs, GB News said it hopes to create at least 120 positions. They include more than 100 journalists in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland with the channel. Global media and entertainment company Discovery, Inc is the lead investor.

GB News will feature more than 6,500 hours of content a year, made exclusively for the channel, which has secured broadcasting licences from Ofcom. It has been founded by media executives Andrew Cole and Mark Schneider. They said: 'Andrew Neil epitomises what GB News is all about. 'He's an exceptional journalist, brilliant interviewer and fearlessly independent.'

They plan for the channel to reach 96% of British television households via Freeview, Sky and Virgin Media. The BBC confirmed this summer that Neil's self-titled show would not return to TV screens after it came off air during the pandemic

GB News will broadcast seven days a week across the UK and Ireland and will be available globally on GB News digital platforms. Sky launched a 24-hour news channel in 1989 and the BBC followed, in the UK, in 1997.



Former Sky News executive editor John McAndrew, left, will be director of news and programming and ex-Sky News Australia chief executive Angelos Frangopoulos has been appointed chief executive officer. GB News said that more announcements will be made in the coming weeks.

The BBC has thanked Andrew Neil for his work at the corporation following the news he will be the face and chairman of GB News. A statement said: 'We'd like to give our heartfelt thanks to Andrew for his many years of work for the BBC, during which he's informed and entertained millions of viewers. 'We wish Andrew every success in his new role; we're sorry the US election coverage will be his last BBC presentation work for the foreseeable future, but he will always be welcome at the BBC.'

Arch-critics of BBC Dacre and Moore tipped for top jobs in TV

By Caroline Wheeler and Tim Shipman, The Times September 27 2020

BORIS JOHNSON is ushering in a revolution at the top of British broadcasting by offering two of the top jobs in television to outspoken critics of the BBC. Paul Dacre, the former editor of the Daily Mail, is the prime minister's choice to become chairman of Ofcom, the broadcasting regulator, replacing Lord Burns, who is due to leave before the end of the year.

Lord Moore, the former editor of the Daily Telegraph and biographer of Margaret Thatcher, who has condemned the criminalisation of those who refuse to pay the licence fee, has been asked by the prime minister to take up the post of BBC chairman. The potential appointments of two right-wing Brexiteers will send shockwaves through the broadcasting establishment.

Dacre was wooed by Johnson over drinks in Downing Street in February, before the Covid pandemic struck, and is now in talks with No 10 about the Ofcom role. Dacre will want to crack down on alleged BBC bias and encourage the corporation to downsize to focus on its core public service responsibilities. However, he is on record as wanting to preserve the corporation, and Whitehall sources say he "passionately believes it needs saving from itself".

- During his editorship at the Daily Mail, Dacre was also highly critical of digital platforms such as Google and Facebook that earn huge sums by recycling stories from other media outlets without payment and peddle "fake news". Whitehall sources said Dacre was prepared to take on the role provided he is given assurances about his freedom to act. No 10 sources confirmed he is the prime minister's preferred candidate.

The double appointment is an audacious move to install figures more sympathetic to the government in positions that have traditionally been perceived as the natural home for more liberal-minded executives. "This is part of a process of the prime minister putting allies in key positions," said one source close to Johnson.



The prime minister asked Moore, left, to take on the BBC chairmanship around a month ago and in recent days, senior figures say, it is virtually a “done deal”. Moore — handed a peerage by Johnson in August — is still in negotiations over the exact details of his contract.

However, the failure to advertise the BBC role has unleashed a government row since the appointment of its chairman is supposed to be an open process. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport was last night scrabbling to finalise plans to publish the job description for the BBC

chairman’s role and invite applications this week. One official in the department even said they were not aware of Johnson’s offer to Moore. A similar public applications process for the Ofcom chairmanship is expected to open next month.

No 10 sources were keen to downplay the idea that Johnson wants to go to war with the BBC, praising the new director general Tim Davie, in a sign that No 10 wants to do business with him. Davie has already warned BBC journalists to rein in personal political statements on social media platforms like Twitter and their lucrative outside earnings.

However, another senior Conservative familiar with the discussions said: “Within the BBC there will be an awful lot of people who will find his [Moore’s] appointment alarming. I think it can only make Davie’s life more difficult.”

Moore’s appointment clears the way for the decriminalisation of those who refuse to pay the BBC licence fee, which is expected to hit revenue by £200m annually. Ministers are due to respond to a public consultation on the issue in the next few months.



As editor of the Mail, Dacre, left, was a fervent critic of BBC bias and waste, backing the publication of the salaries of the corporation’s top talent. He remains on the board of the Mail’s parent company, Associated Newspapers, a position he is likely to come under pressure to relinquish.

Dacre is a bogeyman figure for many on the left, but his allies often stress that he has a history of defending freedom of expression and has been hostile to Tory governments as well as Labour. At

Gordon Brown’s request, he also undertook a review of the 30-year rule on the release of state secrets, which led to most government papers becoming available after 20 years rather than 30 years.

Dacre was approached for the Ofcom chairman’s job after Dame Melanie Dawes, a former Whitehall mandarin, was installed as chief executive in February.

The incumbent chairman, Lord Burns, had fought to ensure that job went to a civil servant rather than someone political. But having secured Dawes’s appointment he agreed to go in 2020, rather than work until the end of his four-year term in 2022.

A government spokesman said: “We will launch the application process for the new chair of the BBC shortly. It is an open recruitment process and all public appointments are subject to a robust and fair selection criteria.”

Dominic Cummings sends message to military by brandishing historic letter by US military strategist

By Danielle Sheridan, The Telegraph Political Correspondent 15 September 2020

DOMINIC CUMMINGS sent a message to military chiefs as he strategically brandished a historic letter from a leading US military strategist ahead of the looming defence shake-up. Boris Johnson's chief adviser was photographed holding the letter, dated 1986, from the former US air force general Bernard Schriever, one of the leading figures of the US missile and space programmes, as he entered Downing Street on Tuesday morning.

The document, which appears to rail against the "blizzard of legislation" around defence procurement and accused the system of "inhibiting technological innovation", was written to David Packard, who carried out a review of defence spending for President Ronald Reagan.

Mr Cummings, who holds a lead role in the integrated defence review, has previously hailed General Schriever, as a "phenomenally successful" manager for his work on rapidly deploying intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

In the letter General Schriever wrote: "I strongly believe that the wise and timely application of technology to provide qualitatively superior weapons, second only to people, is the most important ingredient to our national security."

It comes after the Defence Secretary, Ben Wallace, said earlier this week that Britain's armed forces will be reshaped to be "fit for tomorrow's battles, not fighting yesterday's".

However, many have expressed concern over what a reshaped Armed Forces could look like. Last month the former Chief of the General Staff spoke out over proposals to scrap tanks as part of the review, which he said would be "dangerous thinking".

General Lord Dannatt previously told The Telegraph: "Dominic Cummings is clearly driving a lot of things at the heart of Government but I don't think he has a particularly well developed understanding of the requirements of defence."

Meanwhile concerns were also raised by naval sources as this newspaper revealed that anti-submarine warships could be cut down to single figures following the review, with the potential for the UK's existing fleet of frigates to be reduced from 13 to just eight.

It comes after the Defence Select Committee was warned by defence experts that the proposed number of F-35 fighter jets, which are also to be debated during the review, are not enough to aid the three-armed forces.

Appearing before the committee, Justin Bronk, Research Fellow in Combat Airpower and Technology, Royal United Services Institute, said: "There is a huge reliance being placed in all three of the armed services on what the F-35 Lightning II fighter jets can bring. There is far too few of them to cover all of that." It has been suggested that Britain could buy only half its target of 138 F-35s.



Mr Bronk added that the review needed to make clear whether the jets were to be used exclusively for the aircraft carriers, or if they were wanted to do other things, in which case the number of fighter jets procured would "have to go really significantly above 70".

‘I THINK WE KNOW WHAT THE LATEST DEFENCE ‘LEAK’ REALLY MEANS....’

By Howard Wheeldon, September 22 2020. Pen & Sword Club member, Howard is an internationally recognised commentator on financial, defence and aviation matters. His limited circulation analyses provide deep insights into UK political, military and media matters. Leaks surrounding the Integrated Defence Review and the uncertainties they cause in the defence community have exercised his journalistic skills in the last few weeks.



YET ANOTHER of what I can only imagine to be a ‘deliberate leak’ by the MOD today and which Lucy Fisher, Defence editor at ‘The Times’ (who will soon be joining the Daily Telegraph as deputy political editor) has tweeted this morning saying “Britain is set to slash its order of early-warning radar jets, redrawing a controversial contract awarded without competition in bid to save money. MoD has drawn up plans, she says, to revise order for E-7 Wedgetail jets from five to three”.

This time, it appears to be more than just about ‘testing the water’ with a ‘leaked suggestion’ about a possible cut in numbers – it appears from what MOD has this morning replied to the Lucy Fisher tweet saying that “officials reopened discussions with Boeing about the £2.1 bn programme over the summer with a view to achieving better value for money”. I think we all know what that

really means!

To say anything other than that I am appalled at the content of the tweet and which I have no doubt whatsoever to be fully in-line with current MOD botched thinking, would be an understatement. Indeed, I view any suggestion of cutting numbers of RAF E-7 Wedgetail aircraft from five to four let alone from five to three would have very dangerous connotations for future UK defence. I will elaborate my reasons further down.

E-7 Wedgetail is the world’s most advanced, capable and reliable proven in-service military command and control aircraft capability. The thought process behind the notion of cutting the number of aircraft is clearly based on the MOD saving on initial cost and through life operation.

But cutting the number of airframes when we are talking of such specialist capability designed to rapidly identify airborne and maritime threats and guide RAF combat aircraft



capability to specific targets and areas would be fool’s gold.

The UK needs all five E-7 AEWACS (Airborne Early Warning And Control System) ‘Wedgetail’ aircraft that it ordered from Boeing in March 2019 not only in order to replace the UK’s ageing fleet of

Sentry E3-D AEW1 capability, but to ensure that they are there providing the information that fast jet pilots need when they are deployed.

- Of all the many deliberate ‘test the water’ and other deliberate ‘leaks’ that have emerged from the MOD over the past few months ahead of final so-called ‘strategically’ thought out and led future intentions that will be made known later this year when the ‘Integrated Review of Foreign Policy, Defence and Security’ is published, I regard this one as being by far the most dangerous and one that I would personally regard as being little short of insanity.

Allow me to add this thought as well - if anyone really is still under the illusion that the underlying intention behind the 2020 ‘Integrated Review’ process – that of forming a soundly based long-term strategic decision making process of where the UK wants to be in the future, where, why and what defence and security capability will be required to meet those ambitions, let them now understand that the reality is that what eventually emerges will primarily have been about further cutting of UK defence capability at a time when others, including our adversaries and would-be enemies, are increasing their expenditure on defence.

Clearly this was an intended leak

By Howard Wheeldon

THERE CAN BE FEW unaware that within what they are calling an ‘Integrated Review of Defence, Security and Foreign Policy’ we are about to have another infernal and more than likely, damaging review in relation to most aspects of UK Defence.

Deep down we also know that while the outcome of the review is bound to contain good points that it will also be littered with many bad. We know too that SDSR 2015 was over ambitious and unaffordable and that SDSR 2010 was, as I termed it when last writing on the subject back in April 2019, a tragedy. To be fair, the 1997 Robertson Defence Review was, compared to those before and after, excellent. As to those that went before - I am all of a sudden reminded of the term ‘Rifkind’s Follies’!



From a few years ago now, I also recall someone who I will not name and whose experience, knowledge and judgement on matters military is beyond question, observed the following comments to me privately:

“Conversation on defence capabilities is invariably focussed on equipment and cost. I have not heard any recent public comment on recruiting and retention. The last I heard was that all three Services were under-manned and that would cause me significant worry for now and the future. The simple fact is that in scraping around for “efficiency” savings there is inevitable pressures on conditions of service that end up with further erosion of benefits.

I have seen that time and time again which has gone hand in glove with a similar and steady erosion of the influence of the Chiefs of Staff both individually and as a Committee.

The point needs to be made repeatedly that the best kit in the world has no value without adequate numbers of well trained and motivated personnel – and with the Chiefs rusticated to the countryside (a long standing ambition of the Civil Service) the few remaining military in Whitehall remain under the thumb of the Civil Service and their political masters.

They are experts in talking up potential threats (without definition of a defence strategy) and in the implementation of measures in harmony with current political correctness. They are less expert, notwithstanding legitimate concern about vexatious claims against the military past and present, in protecting the equally legitimate interests of serving personnel as it affects their conditions of service and career prospects”

Just a couple of days after the MOD called on Defence Opinion Leaders (that is a small group of us who attend regular briefs at the MOD) together with those with a vested interest and who may well be playing a direct role in our nations’ security and prosperity (Industry and Military) to enter submission in regard of the Integrated Defence, Security and Foreign Policy Review process. Lo and behold this morning we see observed in the Times under the title ‘Military chiefs look at mothballing Britain’s [Main Battle] tank fleet, under radical move to modernise the Army.

- *Clearly this was an ‘intended’ leak from the MOD to a chosen journalist (Lucy Fisher) in order for the MOD to test the waters of public or should I better say, political, press and media opinion. Well they did that alright, and I suspect they have now run back into Main Building for cover with tin hats on!*

For what it’s worth, while I can envisage current numbers of ageing Challenger Main Battle Tanks being reduced, I cannot for one moment envisage that in my lifetime Britain will no longer have any Main Battle tanks – albeit that I also believe there will perhaps need to be a better understanding amongst our NATO allies that some of them are better placed in mainland Europe to lead in this important aspect of warfare.

That is not to suggest either that whatever the number envisaged to remain is, that there should be any change of plan in regard of the very much needed upgrade programme that MOD and industry have been working on for some time. Bottom line is my view then that MOD will have Challenger tanks driving on its lawns for quite a few more years yet!

Britain needs a grown-up China strategy, not a defence cut from Cummings

By Alexander Woolfson, July 10, 2020, The Article.

Alexander Woolfson is a defence and security analyst and journalist. He lectures and teaches on irregular warfare and the politics of NATO. He is an associate fellow of the Royal United Services Institute and a visiting professor at Argentina’s national defence academy.

He previously served as senior communications adviser at the BBC, where he also worked as a radio journalist on the ‘World at One’ and ‘PM’ and defence analyst for BBC News. He holds his MA from the University of Cambridge and his MSc and PhD from the London School of Economics.

ON TUESDAY, US defence secretary Mark Esper confirmed that China was now the most significant military threat facing the United States and that the military would make China “the pacing threat in all our schools, programmes and training”. Where does this leave Britain, currently engaged in her own confrontations with Beijing, not to mention trying to form a defence strategy which continues to tie our defence to our “indispensable ally” over the Atlantic?

The picture is rather bleak. Britain's long anticipated and now long delayed defence review is being plunged into political and intellectual turmoil at precisely the moment we need maximum clarity about how the UK deals with the most pressing threat — an increasingly assertive and potentially belligerent China.

The Integrated defence review has finally restarted but it is not clear who is really leading it. The leak earlier in the week that Dominic Cummings was engaged in a series of visits to defence and security sites across the UK is not desperately surprising to even the most casual observer of British politics. Cummings has always expressed an interest in reforming the vastly inefficient defence procurement process and few independent observers can really fault that ambition.

The more important and yet unknown question remains the extent to which Cummings will try to direct the more fundamental strategic questions and the shape and size of the armed forces. Nominally Professor John Bew, the respected academic is meant to be leading the integrated review and providing some meat to bare bones strategy of “global Britain”, providing us, hopefully with a detailed strategy for the UK.



Yet an evidence session with the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Nick Carter, also this week, revealed a lack of coherent leadership of the review. The astute Labour MP and former shadow defence secretary, Kevan Jones, right, pressed Carter to tell him who was politically leading the review. Carter was unable to give an unambiguous response.

He responded that the First Secretary was leading until David Frost takes over as national security advisor. Frost will not start in this role until the end of August and will presumably still have most of his energy directed at the huge task of negotiating Brexit. With the Integrated Review due to report in the Autumn and a lack of a “heavy hitter” leading it in the interim, there is a fear that it might simply be reduced to a political exercise.

- Tobias Ellwood chair of the defence select committee was prompted to tweet that “If correct and Dominic Cummings is formally involved in reviewing the UK's defence and security architecture then he should be subject to the same parliamentary scrutiny as ministers, military personnel and the civil service.”

It is more important than ever that we have a serious defence review, run by professional strategists rather than political advisers. The review must involve robust strategic thinking and must fund the military to the extent required by geopolitical demands. It should not be a source of easy budget cuts in a time of economic pressure.

The geopolitical context of all of this matters a great deal. Speaking last week in the wake of the China's imposition of draconian new security laws in Hong Kong, Boris Johnson hardened Britain's stance towards China, for the first time referring to it (in the context of Huawei) as a “hostile state”.

The response from China's ambassador in London, Liu Xiaoming was in keeping with the bellicose new brand of Wolf-Warrior diplomacy practised by China. The not so thinly veiled threat was that it was “not in the UK's interest” to make an enemy of Beijing.

What exactly does this mean for Britain? We can see quite clearly how China operates, having punished Australian beef and wool exports earlier in the year after Canberra called for an inquiry into China's handling of Covid-19. No doubt Britain will go to the back of the queue if China becomes first to develop a Covid vaccine, but Beijing's threats of future action actually conceal the extent to which China is currently involved in political operations in the UK.



General Carter's evidence to the select committee is worth revisiting. There is a disconnect emerging between the UK government and the military. Carter told the defence select committee that China represented a "challenge rather than a threat".

The divide in language and thought between the Prime Minister and the Chief of the Defence Staff shows the extent to which Britain still lacks a coherent strategy for dealing with China. Policy flip-flopping on areas such as Chinese involvement in

critical national infrastructure is no substitute for clear thinking.

Any defence review, as Carter acknowledged, should not be concerned with the present but should look five or ten years into the future. We can see the preparations our allies are making. Australia has just committed to a defence modernisation programme which sensibly, given the economic impact of Covid-19, decouples it from a GDP target. The UK government, in contrast, is expected to use the decline in economic activity as a stealthy way to trim defence spending. Australia and the US are both retooling their strategies and military capabilities for a possible military engagement with China.

The UK does not have the same geographic exposure to Asia as the US or Australia. A benevolent reading of Carter's view of China as a "challenge" rather than a "threat" might acknowledge that. A more robust analysis would engage with China's "Three Warfares" strategy which introduced the concepts of public opinion warfare, psychological warfare and legal warfare and retooled the Peoples' Liberation Army around fighting such wars in the early 2000s. In other words, China does not consider war to just involve tanks and guns. In this context Carter's assurances seem like a significant downplaying of events.

- Even if we dismiss the issue of Hong Kong as a moral issue rather than a threat to a vital interest, there were more worrying revelations about the infiltration of China into UK politics this week. A leaked report called China's Elite Capture revealed the extent to which China has made links with leading politicians, academics and businesspeople in order to advance her interests in critical infrastructure. Even if, in strictly military terms, General Carter is correct in his assessment,

China is rapidly becoming a security threat. Carter is perhaps guilty of separating Chinese political warfare from their hard power. The UK requires a truly integrated approach to China that recognises the sophistication of Chinese strategy, both military and non-military in undermining her adversaries, of which the UK is one.

Carter also expressed what is well known in defence circles but might surprise the general public, that the UK concedes that it will never (indeed could not) go to war without an ally and that ally will almost certainly be the US. So, while the former foreign secretary Philip Hammond is concerned about an "outbreak of anti-Chinese sentiment within the Conservative Party", the reality is that Britain is drifting further apart from her primary ally's stance on China.

A strategic dilemma is emerging. For NATO's most powerful member, Europe's Russian threat is being demoted in favour of an area of operations in the Indo-Pacific. This is of no direct geographic interest to most of Europe and China currently presents little direct military threat to the European continent. Yet as the British experience suggests,

China certainly does not limit its conception of warfare to kinetic, military tactics. We are already at war with China at the political and economic level.

The exercise of physical, coercive power these days is highly targeted and limited, as the people of Hong Kong have regrettably just found out. It is high time that we came up with a modern defence strategy that recognises all of the instruments of national power and how best to mobilise them in the national interest, rather than focusing on military strength as if it existed in a vacuum. Otherwise we may lose any future conflict before we even realise it has begun.

How leaks and sources are used in politics

Extract from BBC News Beat, 2019

HOW MANY TIMES have you read or heard a news story with a quote, or some information attributed to "a source"? Or seen that the reporter "understands" that someone holds a certain point of view? That's probably a sign that they've been briefed or sent documents by the person in question (or someone who works for them). But it's all been done in a deniable, "you-didn't-hear-this-from-me" kind of way. Or, to put it more bluntly, it's been leaked.



Information, rumours and gossip are leaked on pretty much a daily basis. It's part of the fabric of Westminster politics. So, how do leaks happen? They could take place in a bar or with a rushed conversation in the hallways of Westminster - and that's the image many of us probably have in mind.

Remember, Westminster is a physical place. Think of yourself swapping gossip with colleagues at your workplace - it's no different. But these days it's just as likely to be on WhatsApp as over a drink.?

So, what's in it for the journalist? Fairly obvious really - they get to be first with the story, the person with a glimpse behind the curtain. And consider this: without leaks, what kind of political news would we have? Only what the people in charge of the parties want us to hear.

- And what are the benefits of leaking for the politician or staff member? Well, that's a bit more nuanced. They might want to build a relationship with a journalist who may be useful in the future - and a little "you scratch my back..." seldom goes amiss.

They might disagree with a planned policy and feel that bringing it out into the light could change public opinion or at least spark a debate. It could be pure politics - an attempt to make yourself look great or undermine one of your rivals. Or of course it may be genuine concern that an injustice was being done and a desire to blow the whistle.

And why leak privately rather than issue a press release (or more likely, a tweet) with your name on it? Quite simply, deniability. No names, no comeback. Though there are always exceptions.

A brief history of leaks

Labour politician Jimmy Thomas was forced to stand down in 1936 after leaking details of the Budget. Legend has it that he would drop hints to his golfing buddies like shouting, "Tee up!" to indicate that the tax on tea was about to rise.

In 1947 Chancellor Hugh Dalton had to stand down. He had chatted about his Budget plans to a newspaper reporter and they appeared in the paper before he gave his speech. That was by no means the last Budget leak. In fact, newspaper headlines with eerily accurate predictions have become the norm.

And it's not just financial information of course. All kinds of juicy things have ended up in the ears of journalists over the years, as what are sometimes called the "dark arts" became more and more commonplace at Westminster.

Is leaking against the rules? Or even against the law?

There's an important distinction between the law, and the unwritten code that governs the way politicians work together. If classified or sensitive information has been disclosed, that's one thing. But if we're talking about Westminster rumours and gossip, things are not clear-cut.

More than anything else, leaking can be a sign of a breakdown in party discipline. A sign that politicians are acting for their own ends rather than sticking to the script. But it's part of the UK political landscape. A cog in a great machine. And it seems unlikely to go anywhere.

"If everyone ratted each other out for leaking," one well-placed source at Westminster tells Newsbeat, "it'd be a bloodbath."

MoD deals with 70 security leaks a week as staff post secret details online

By Mike Hamilton, The Sun, April 2020

DEFENCE chiefs admit to dealing with 70 security breaches a week. The biggest blunders saw staff posting ship positions, troop moves and weaponry details on social media. Passcodes to MoD secure cabinets and an official service ID card were also put on Facebook. Troops now face having phones seized after security incidents trebled in the last five years.

Former Army commander Colonel Richard Kemp warned the details risk falling into the hands of Chinese and Russian spies or terrorist groups. He added: "These latest statistics show the need for culture change and stringent discipline among service personnel. "That includes, where necessary, draconian measures such as removal of mobiles and strict control of internet usage."

There were 4,431 incidents in 2018 — the most recent year for complete figures — but just 1,515 back in 2014. There have been also 117 information leaks on to social media in that time, with a record 31 in the last 12 months. Last week we told how pictures of the Special Boat Service were posted on Facebook, showing faces and equipment used on secret operations. Other breaches include RAF personnel posting classified information of aircraft damage.

The MoD said: "The increase in incidents is attributed to an increasing readiness to report even minor breaches — not to systematic failings."



Defence chiefs face battle over plan to scrap tanks

Lucy Fisher, Defence Editor, The Times Aug 25, 2020

MILITARY CHIEFS have drawn up plans to mothball all of Britain's tanks under radical proposals to modernise the armed forces. The move would lead to other military assets being given priority over heavy armour; The Times understands. The government is examining the controversial idea as the cost of upgrading Britain's ageing fleet of 227 Challenger 2 tanks, and the 388 Warrior armoured fighting vehicles that support them on the battlefield, has soared.



Lucy Fisher is defence correspondent at The Times, having previously worked as their chief political correspondent.

Lucy reported on politics for The Times, the Observer and the New Statesman after she won Anthony Howard Award in 2013. She is the author of Emily Wilding Davison: The Suffragette Who Died For Women's Rights.

She studied Classics at University where she was a Roger Short scholar and choral exhibitor.

Both vehicles were branded "obsolete" last year, and the argument has been made in the Ministry of Defence that the changing character of warfare demands more investment in cyber capabilities, space and other cutting-edge technologies.

The budget for army kit is already squeezed and the ministry is preparing for its funding to be cut owing to the economic fallout from the coronavirus.

Talks related to giving up the tank are part of the government's integrated foreign policy, defence and security review, which is due to conclude in November. A government source said last night:

"We know that a number of bold decisions need to be taken in order to properly protect British security and rebalance defence interests to meet the new threats we face."

While options remain on the table to upgrade the Challenger 2 or to buy the German Leopard 2 tank, Britain is already sounding out NATO partners about the proposal to give up heavy armour and overhaul its military contribution to the alliance.

The new offer would focus on taking a leadership role in attack aviation, offering all 50 Apache helicopters to allies along with heavy-lift refuelling and battlefield reconnaissance helicopters, plus training and support facilities. Britain would also offer to contribute brigades that help early entry into theatre as well as cyber, electronic and unconventional warfare capabilities.

- British liaison officers have raised the plan in recent weeks with senior personnel within the US army in Europe and NATO's allied land command in Izmir, Turkey, it is understood. Proposals have also been drawn up to close the British Army's training base in Alberta, Canada, where it practises heavy armour live-firing drills.

One senior British defence source said that the plan to get rid of the army's tanks was likely to harm Britain's leadership role within the transatlantic alliance and its status as a partner of choice for the United States more widely.

"We simply will not be viewed as a credible leading NATO nation if we cannot field close-combat capabilities. It places us behind countries such as France, Germany, Poland and Hungary," the source said, adding that the move was "dressing up financial pressures as capability choices".



General Sir Richard Barrons, former commander joint forces command, expressed support for transforming land combat power and said that Britain could lead the way in a modernisation effort. "The future is about manned/unmanned autonomous things [personnel remotely controlling or deploying unmanned equipment].

"If you were to recapitalise your land army, you would not simply press on, spending all your money on a small number of manned platforms, because you'll be putting yourself another generation behind," he said.

Under the proposal for the army to lose its heavy armour, its Challenger tanks would most probably be placed in deep preservation, leaving the option to bring them out in a crisis. It is understood that the army could afford to

upgrade or replace only between 150 to 170 of its tank fleet if it forged ahead with retaining the capability.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Defence said: "Our commitment to NATO is unwavering, and the UK recognises that as a global military power our greatest strength remains our alliances. We are engaging our international allies and industry partners as we develop and shape defence's contribution to the integrated review." The spokesman added that "no decisions have been made regarding troop positioning".

Britain may halve fighter jet purchases

Lucy Fisher, Defence Editor, The Times Aug 26 2020

BRITAIN COULD BUY only half its target of 138 F-35 Lightning II fighter jets, according to sources close to the government's defence review. The UK has agreed to buy 48 of the stealth multirole jets by the end of 2025 for £9.1 billion. It is the most expensive weapons system in military history.



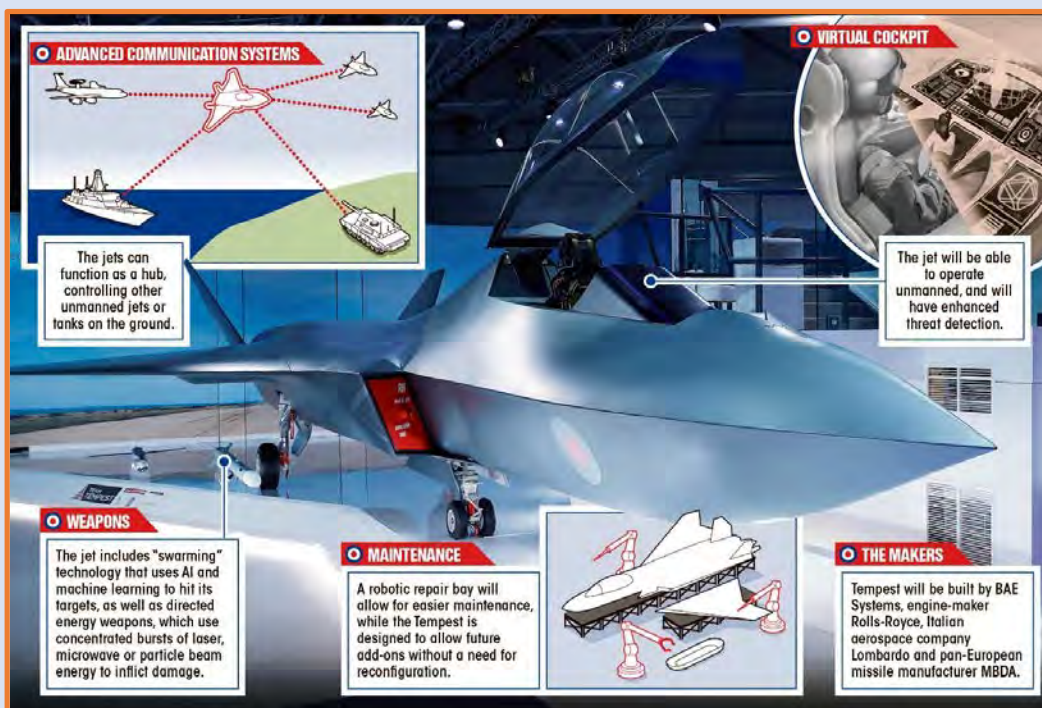
Britain has ordered the short take-off and vertical landing variant of the jet, which is designed to fly from aircraft carriers. The Royal Navy's Queen Elizabeth-class carriers are expected to deploy with between 12 and 36 F-35s on board, depending on the operation.

A wider British aspiration to buy 138 of the aircraft over the lifespan of the US-led programme is seen as unlikely to be fulfilled, defence sources said. The 138 figure was confirmed as an ambition in the UK defence review in 2015, but the Commons defence committee noted later that this decision was taken "following some hesitation". Britain is not contractually obliged to buy any more than 48.

- It is understood that as part of the foreign policy, defence and security integrated review due to conclude in November, military chiefs have discussed the figure of 70 F-35s as a credible minimum total order. Discussions are said to be continuing about how to balance investment in the American-designed jets that are state-of-the-art and in production, with channelling funding into Tempest, a next-generation fighter jet programme led by the UK that is at an early stage.

A third factor in Britain's combat air-power funding equation is a scheme to upgrade the RAF's Typhoon fighter jets with the latest technology. In the longer term the aim is for the Tempest jet, which is due to come into service from 2035, to replace Typhoons when they are phased out of service from the late 2030s.

However, a defence source emphasised last night that no final decisions in the review had been taken. "With every review it is always the case that people draw early and false conclusions from leaks. We advise against making assumptions based on partial information," the source said. "The guiding principle of the [integrated review] is to ask ourselves what the threat is, and whether we have the capability to meet it."



In 2001 Britain invested \$2 billion in the development of the F-35, becoming the only tier-one partner to the US, which has invested hundreds of billions of dollars in it. About 15 per cent of the F-35, by value, is made in the UK and there are global orders for 3,000 over the course of the jet's lifetime.

Tempest, which is envisaged as being “optionally manned” so that it can be piloted by a human or operated remotely as an unstaffed platform, has attracted £2 billion of investment so far. It is set to control a swarm of unmanned combat drones, also known as “loyal wingmen”, which will fly alongside it. Tobias Ellwood, Conservative chairman of the Commons defence select committee, urged ministers to think carefully before slashing the number of total F-35 orders.

“In the first Gulf War, we had 36 fast-jet squadrons; we are now down to six. We’re getting close to having a niche combat capability. We can’t keep eroding our spectrum of capability in this way,” he said yesterday.

- Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon, former head of the RAF, said: “Am I happy with the idea of cutting F-35s in the long-term? No, I’m not, because it would undoubtedly leave us even shorter of frontline combat squadrons.”

However, Justin Bronk, a research fellow in combat air-power at the Royal United Services Institute, said that although a fleet of 70 F-35s would be “on the lower end of expectations”, it “makes sense”. At that number, the RAF would be able to keep 60 in service, with ten held back to replace any aircraft lost to attrition or age-related damage, he said. Mr Bronk suggested that investment in Tempest may create British jobs but was sceptical that the resulting jet would outperform the F-35.

“Even in an optimistic scenario, the UK and Italy with potentially other partners such as



Sweden will be able to contribute a fraction of the investment in both development and acquisition of the US to a next-generation fighter programme,” he said. “So, it should be admitted up front that the overall capability is likely to be behind what the Americans are producing at a similar point, making the arguments for Tempest primarily sovereign industrial arguments rather than operational capability ones.”

Francis Tusa, editor of the Defence Analysis newsletter, said: “It’s obvious 138 is a vaporous figure, unless you were to say, ‘Let’s scrap the army completely and spend the money on the RAF’. Support costs of F-35s [are] eye-watering and the availability rate is poor because of the waiting time for spare parts.”

Britain’s flagship aircraft carrier in the Falklands conflict of 1982 is to be scrapped after plans to save it failed. The salvaged metal could be used for motorcycles. HMS Hermes was once the oldest serving warship in the world before being decommissioned in 2017. It was sold to the Indian navy in 1986 and has now been sold again in Mumbai for £5.1 million to Shree Ram Group, Asia’s biggest ship scrapyard.

Exclusive: anti-submarine warships could be cut down to single figures

By Danielle Sheridan, Political Correspondent 26 August 2020

ANTI-SUBMARINE WARSHIPS could be cut down to single figures following the Integrated Defence and Security Review, naval sources have warned, in an act that has been deemed a “national embarrassment” for a maritime nation. The Telegraph understands that the UK’s existing fleet of frigates could be reduced from 13 to just eight ahead of the highly anticipated review, as replacing them with newer models has proven costly.

“The UK could fall into single number frigates,” a naval source warned. “We could have less than 10 warships because new build stuff is in the firing line.”

The Ministry of Defence has currently requested three Type 26 frigates and five of the Type 31s – in order to replace the aging Type 23s (which have been functioning since the early 1990s and are likely to retire by 2025).

The source added that the Government “probably won’t order more” and cautioned that “it would be stupid not to”. The Government has previously said that it aims to have the first Type 31 launched in 2023, with five ships delivered by the end of 2028.



However, a defence industry source warned that they had heard that one possibility was to “cut the existing frigates early to save money and delay the order and introduction of the new frigates, which would leave a gaping chasm”.

“This is just staggering,” they said. “It is a very dangerous situation. “You might as well start claiming that you are going to defend Great Britain with a bunch of dugout canoes.

“This is a painful situation for an island nation that claims it wants to be more visible on the global stage.”

It comes after it was revealed that tanks were being considered as an area to be cut as part of the review, of which Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson’s chief adviser, is heavily involved in.

“I don’t think he (Mr Cummings) understands the bare facts,” the source added. “He doesn’t understand what these decisions mean and how they are interpreted by our adversaries and enemies.”

- Lord West, the former first sea lord, said that while the “first responsibility” for a Government conducting such a review should be the defence and security of “our islands and people”, the current review “is being driven by the requirement to find savings rather than the threats that need to be countered”.

“The alliances that are so important to our security consist of countries that have relied on our military contribution, which is faltering,” he said. “It’s a national embarrassment for a great maritime nation to have a pitiful small number of frigates.”

Lord West added that the prospect of “single figure” frigates would “impact on protection of our deterrent, protection of merchant ships in the Gulf, providing escorts for the new carriers and operations in the Far East, Baltic, Mediterranean and Falklands”.

Tobias Ellwood, Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, asked if there was “no aspect of the military that isn’t going to be salami sliced?” “It all smacks of a rapidly deteriorating integrated review. They are less interested in our defence posture and more about a domestic revolution across Whitehall. It’s dangerous and we are playing with fire here to reduce our military architecture in the way that’s being considered.”

An MoD spokesman said: "With every review it is always the case that people draw early and false conclusions from leaks. We advise against making assumptions based on partial information. "The guiding principle of the Integrated Review is to ask ourselves what the threat is, and whether we have the capability to meet it."



Next BBC boss must tackle bias, say ministers

By Harry Yorke, Telegraph Political Correspondent August 22 2020

THE NEXT CHAIR of the BBC must help restore the broadcaster’s reputation for impartiality, ministers believe, as they prepare to publish a job advert for the role within days. Amid mounting frustration within Government over the corporation’s news programmes, The Telegraph has been told the successful candidate will be tasked with reviving trust in its reporting.

Whitehall sources involved in the process of replacing Sir David Clementi, the outgoing chair, also believe applicants for the role will need to be help guide it through “significant reform.” This includes the potential decriminalisation of the non-payment of the licence fee, a move which would place further strain on the corporation’s finances.

The focus on the BBC’s impartiality follows a fresh row last week after Newsnight’s policy editor Lewis Goodall was accused of “off the scale” bias for writing for a Left-wing magazine attacking the Government’s handling of the exam crisis. While the BBC insisted the article had met its impartiality guidelines, it comes just months after presenter Emily Maitlis was reprimanded over a monologue attacking the Government’s handling of Dominic Cummings’ lockdown trip to Durham.

- The new chair will be expected to work closely with Tim Davie, the new director general, who ministers believe is in the “mood to be radical” in shaking up the BBC at a time of major upheaval in broadcasting. It is understood that the £100,000-a-year role will also be “beefed up”, reflecting the Government’s desire for the next chair to play an influential role in driving through changes.

It comes after the Telegraph last week revealed that former Tory Cabinet minister Nicky Morgan had been touted as a contender, with another believed to come from the tech sector. However, Government insiders have played down suggestions there is a firm favourite to land the job, insisting that ministers are waiting to see who applies before making any judgement.

Speaking to the Telegraph on Saturday, a Government source said: “There is a considerable concern around impartiality and objectivity. It’s not that the BBC is left-wing and Labour supporting, it clearly isn’t.

“But lots of people think its news programmes seem only to be interested in picking holes in the Government or digging up embarrassing quotes. They are far less interested in listening to what ministers have to say than trying to trip them up in a way that is not entirely relevant. The job of the Today programme is not to chase headlines, but to ask probing questions. Newsnight is no better. It’s a relatively recent trend.”

Previously, Downing Street temporarily ordered ministers to boycott BBC Radio 4’s Today programme over anger at the broadcaster’s general election coverage. The BBC has also come under intense criticism from supporters of former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn.

While critics of the BBC believe it should switch to a subscription model, the source suggested instead that the new chair would need to work with its senior leadership to help it become “leaner, fitter, and concentrating on doing fewer things and doing them better.”

“In the new world of broadcasting where there is so much choice the BBC doesn’t need to be doing everything. There are big questions about size and scope,” they continued.

They also suggested that there was a “greater opportunity” for the corporation to generate greater revenues from its overseas services, such as BBC Worldwide.

The Royal Charter states that the appointment of the chairman may only be made “following a fair and open competition”. The Secretary of State must consult the BBC on the process for appointing the chairman, including on the job specification.

The search for a new candidate has to be conducted in line with the Governance Code on Public Appointments, a lengthy process which involves a selection panel shortlisting candidates and conducting interviews before preparing a report on the preferred candidate and submitting it to the Culture Secretary.

BBC impartiality row: Newsnight policy editor accused of 'off the scale' bias

By Anita Singh, Arts and Entertainment Editor The Telegraph 20 August



THE BBC is at the centre of a fresh impartiality row after Newsnight’s policy editor wrote an article for a Left-wing magazine attacking the Government’s handling of the exam crisis. Lewis Goodall’s piece for the New Statesman was billed on the cover as an examination of “how the Government’s ineptitude created a lost generation” and headlined: “How a Government led by technocrats nearly destroyed a generation of social mobility.”

Goodall, a former Labour activist who previously worked for the Left-wing Institute for Public Policy Research think tank, laid the problems at the door of the Prime Minister’s senior adviser. He wrote: “We cannot know the extent of Dominic Cummings’ involvement in this sorry episode, and it may be that he was not part of it at all. But

his approach encapsulates a method of governing that was on full display throughout.”

The article was signed off by BBC management, who insisted that it was within the corporation's impartiality guidelines.

It was criticised by Sir Robbie Gibb, former director of communications at No 10 and a former head of the BBC's Westminster unit, who said: "Is there anyone more damaging to the BBC's reputation for impartiality than Lewis Goodall? This is so off the scale I don't even know where to begin." Sir Robbie's brother is Nick Gibb, the schools minister.

This latest accusation of impartiality follows the climbdown over Emily Maitlis, who incensed the Tories in May with a monologue attacking the Government's handling of Cummings' lockdown trip to Durham. Maitlis was reprimanded by BBC bosses, who said that she had gone too far.

Goodall's appointment to the Newsnight policy editor job at the beginning of this year also caused dismay in the Tory ranks, as he made no secret of his political views during his previous job as a Sky News reporter.

In 2018, after Boris Johnson wrote a Telegraph article likening women in burkas to letterboxes, Goodall tweeted: "Burkagate reminds us you can say whatever you like in Britain, be rude or even prejudiced and be respected for it, so long as you're posh and powerful."



While at Sky he clashed on camera with Cummings after "doorstepping" him outside an event in Westminster. Cummings told Goodall: "You don't know what you're talking about. So, everyone at home should know - don't watch the news because it's almost all b-----."

The BBC said Goodall had followed "the usual internal BBC processes" by referring the article to management for approval. They said the article complied with the editorial guideline which states that reporters and presenters should not offer "personal views" on political topics but allows them to "offer professional judgments rooted in evidence".

A BBC spokesman said: "While the piece is clearly critical of how examinations were handled by all political parties who govern in the UK, we do not control how the piece is presented on the cover when published."

In the piece, Goodall said that all parties are culpable in the exam fiasco. But he went on to quote an anonymous headteacher who described it as "the ideological end point of the strategic culture war within English state education".

He also likened it to the Windrush scandal, with "the same impersonal regard for circumstances", and said: "I am left with a reminder of how monstrous the state can be."

And he added: "The most surprising thing about the present cabinet is how deeply unpolitical many of its members are - [Gavin] Williamson included."

Newsnight's audience has declined in recent years and the BBC Two show now attracts around 300,000 viewers. But Goodall has built up his own following on social media, where he shared his New Statesman piece and found enthusiastic support.

This is not the first time that Sir Robbie has accused Goodall of bias. In January, a Twitter exchange about Goodall's analysis of Sajid Javid's economic policy ended with Goodall tweeting: "Thanks for this Robbie. Maybe one day, if I'm as impartial as you, I can get a knighthood too."

On Thursday he dismissed accusations of bias in the exams story as "boringly predictable", tweeting: "Thousands of people have had their lives ruined by this. It suits certain people to yet again make this a media story rather than engage with substance. It's just so pathetically in the bubble."

BBC News at Six and Ten could disappear as journalism goes digital

By Jonathan Holmes and Anita Singh, The Telegraph, August 19 2020

THE BBC'S NEWS at Six and News at 10 bulletins will soon be obsolete as coverage moves online, the corporation's head of news has said. Within a decade, news will be in "the digital space" and the BBC's output will be consumed via iPlayer, said Fran Unsworth.

In an interview with the Telegraph, Ms Unsworth, below right, was asked to predict how television news will change over the next five or 10 years. She said: "I think TV journalism will still be around because of the power of pictures to tell a story, but it won't necessarily be received in quite the forms it currently is. So, I still think, ultimately in 10 years' time, we probably won't be consuming linear bulletins exactly. I mean, I might be wrong about that. I doubt it.

"There might be one [bulletin] a day, or something. I think there'll be fewer of them. But I think that the power of how you tell stories through television, pictures, video will just be in a different space. It'll be in the digital space, it'll be on, you know, iPlayer. It'll be on your tablet, your iPhone. "We have to think creatively about what the product is, but that's the direction of travel and I don't think that's changed."

The BBC is "transitioning to a different model for young people, which is all around the smartphone and the tablet".

Asked if the News at Ten might survive, but not the News at Six, Ms Unsworth replied: "Possibly, or maybe the other way round. "Audiences for the main BBC One bulletins have soared during the pandemic. The 6 o'clock programme has achieved ratings of eight million, with six million for the 10 o'clock programme - around double the pre-Covid figures.



Ms Unsworth said large numbers of young people had been tuning in for the first time, but she does not expect them to stick around. “They’re sitting down and watching a television bulletin in a way that I thought they weren’t ever really going to again. So that has been what’s been really interesting about this.

“[But] I’m not under any illusions, to be quite honest with you, because I’ve seen it in the past. You get these big peaks, the big stories like the Bataclan and London Bridge attacks, then the audience falls off again quite rapidly.

“What I would hope is that we’ve changed our image in the mind of the younger viewer, which is that we are there to be relied on, and if they really do want to know what’s happening they will come to us to find out. We’re not just any other news source.”

- The Covid crisis has led to a thawing of the relationship between the BBC and No 10, and also to fewer accusations of bias, Ms Unsworth said.

She explained: “Brexit was a very polarising story, with a lot of very strongly held feelings by the public. So, think that once everybody’s through that and over it, and we’re all focused on a national crisis, there is certainly less heat than the BBC feels as a consequence.” She added: “Bias is often in the eye of the beholder.”

The pandemic has established “what the BBC is for” by providing news coverage, education for home-schooled children, fitness programmes and an extended iPlayer offering to keep the nation entertained, Ms Unsworth said.

The BBC is cutting 520 jobs in its news division as part of an £80 million cost-saving exercise. The Covid crisis has demonstrated that staff can work from home and that the corporation does not need so much office space, according to Ms Unsworth, and there “might well” be fewer presenters getting on planes to cover big stories.

She also joked that reporters and presenters have been curating their Zoom backgrounds, saying. “I think everybody wants to uphold their ‘posh books’ credentials. To be honest, I think this has been of some interest to the viewers, to see inside everybody’s houses. “It’s been surprising for some of us as well: ‘Oh really, he’s got a kitchen like that?’”

Why Britain needs new TV news channels

By David Herman, The Article. Sept 4 2020. is a freelance journalist. He has written for the Guardian, the New Statesman, Prospect and Standpoint, among others.



TWO NEW news stations could soon be coming to British televisions. First there is GB News, the work of a company called All Perspectives, which is controlled by two British-American executives associated with the US billionaire John Malone, pictured left. He’s chairman of Liberty Global, the parent company of the Discovery television network. According to Forbes, Malone, known as the “Cable Cowboy”, is worth almost \$7 billion.

Murdoch media empire, it is being set up by David Rhodes, a former Fox News executive who from 2011-19 was president of CBS News. It is unclear whether this will be a conventional TV channel or online only.

Comment [Mike Pete1]:

Malone and the Murdochs have two things in common: lots of money and right-wing politics. Like Rupert Murdoch, Malone is a big Trump supporter. He and Liberty Media were among the biggest contributors to Trump's inauguration in 2017.

The principal reason for these two new stations is that there's now a huge gap in the market. For decades, British TV news was renowned for its professionalism and its impartiality. In the last few years this has suddenly changed. Roger Mosey, right, former Head of BBC Television News, recently wrote in the New Statesman that BBC news staff are biased metropolitan, remainder liberals:

"The particular problem for the BBC is that many of its staff's Twitter feeds reveal the metropolitan, Remain, liberal bias that its critics have always suspected; and there is a battle ahead too to counter that perception about the mainstream output. It is fine for the BBC to be a liberal organisation internally, and it still needs to do more to increase the diversity of its staff. But it is not acceptable for the BBC on air to morph into a news organisation like America's MSNBC, which is open about its left-of-centre position."



Mosey, is one of the most interesting writers about TV news. He is BBC through and through. If he thinks there is a left-wing bias problem, then the BBC really is in trouble.

The real problem for the BBC is that Mosey is right. It started with accusations of anti-Israel bias. Then in the last few years a whole number of issues came together. The BBC's flagship news programmes became anti-Brexit and anti-Johnson, presenter Emily Maitlis was criticised for attacking Dominic Cummings and Kirsty Wark misrepresented a speech by Michael Gove live on air. Newsnight offered no correction or retraction of this misinterpretation.

The BBC has also increasingly come to support environmental activists, Black Lives Matter activists and calls for the toppling of statues associated with slavery and colonialism. This summer, the BBC announced that the words for Rule Britannia and Land of Hope and Glory would not be sung, it was assumed because of associations with British imperialism. This was hugely unpopular, and the BBC was forced into a U-turn — but it was too little, too late.

- The BBC has come under attack again and again on social media for its left-wing bias. There have been widespread calls to defund the BBC because its news is no longer trusted by many licence payers outside the liberal metropolitan elite.

Alistair Stewart, the former News at Ten newsreader, tweeted recently, "They [the mainstream news broadcasters] created the gap, and an open goal for challengers, with their puerile, dangerous partiality."

This is a perfect opportunity for two media conglomerates to take on the BBC. A YouGov poll this week showed that 24 per cent thought a Fox News-style, opinionated current affairs TV station in the UK is a good idea. 34 per cent think it's a bad idea and 42 per cent don't know. But look at particular groups and the picture changes. 33 per cent of Conservative voters and 32 per cent of Leave voters think it's a good idea. In other words, as the culture wars deepen, the Right is losing patience with the BBC, the Left is not.

The BBC is facing a number of crises. It seems out of touch with Middle England and obsessed with fashionable causes that appeal to the left-wing metropolitan young. But this has alienated a large part of its audience, those who voted Brexit in 2016 and Tory in December.

It is now facing an all-out attack from Times Radio, News GB and a new Murdoch-supported TV news organisation, just when more and more viewers are attacking its news output and it is facing a financial crisis.

PressGazette

FIGHTING FOR JOURNALISM

MoD apologises after press office refused to engage with Declassified journalists - Press Gazette

THE MINISTRY OF Defence apologised after its press office refused to engage with journalists from a UK foreign policy website, leading to accusations of “blacklisting”. Journalists at Declassified UK protested after being told by a Ministry of Defence press officer last month that “we no longer deal with your publication”. Defence Secretary Ben Wallace told MPs on Monday he had commissioned an independent review into the claims. Editor Mark Curtis has said he believed the ban was likely in response to critical coverage of UK policy on his website, which launched last year.

He received an apology from the MoD’s chief operating officer Mike Baker on Tuesday morning saying that the “Directorate of Defence Communications was wrong not to provide a comment to Mr Miller. Right, of Declassified Media Limited on the story about which he was enquiring”. “We apologise for this,” he added.

The apology came less than 24 hours after Wallace gave a statement in the House of Commons saying he was treating the allegations with the “utmost seriousness” and that he wants his department to “treat outlets with fairness and impartiality”.

The National Union of Journalists had urged Wallace to intervene and “ensure that there is no banned list within the ministry”.



“Managing information is challenging, particularly where hostile states use disinformation to subvert our security interests and our policymaking,” Wallace said. “As the House will be aware, all Government media and communication professionals must abide by the Government Communication Service’s propriety guidance and the civil service code. The Ministry of Defence is no different. However, I have been deeply concerned that those standards are alleged not always to have been met in the department.”

The review will be led by Tom Kelly, a former Government communications professional who served as Tony Blair's official spokesman between 2001 and 2007, who was given the brief to establish what underlies the allegations.

Wallace also said he was writing to communications professionals at the MoD and other defence authorities to emphasise his expectations of impartiality.

Curtis said: "We very much welcome the MoD's apology and commitment to a review.

"Declassified UK has quickly become the foremost media

organisation revealing the UK's real role in the world, in contrast to an increasingly sycophantic national press.

"A vibrant democracy demands that public officials cooperate with journalists acting in the public interest."



Curtis did point out that the MoD's apology stopped short of admitting there had been any policy to "blacklist" his publication as it referred only to "allegations".

Law firm Leigh Day wrote to the MoD earlier this month arguing the decision to stop responding to the journalists' enquiries could be a breach of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

They also claimed it was in breach of the Civil Service Code and the Government Communication Service Propriety Guidance which say different organisations must be treated in an even-handed and non-discriminatory way.

Journalist Phil Miller's original enquiry to the MoD had been in relation to a story about a British soldier being investigated for protesting the war in Yemen.

According to the website's account of events, the press officer involved told Miller that he "did not know too much about Declassified" and later asked: "What sort of angle are you taking about the war in Yemen?"

He then told Miller he was "not going to be able to send you anything today" and advised him to send a Freedom of Information request instead, but the press office gave a comment to the Telegraph for the same story.



After being told the press office would no longer "deal with" Declassified, Miller was told: "I was wrong to promise you that we'd give you a line this morning. Sorry for misleading you but I wasn't aware until later in the morning".

BREAKING DEFENSE



Government finally classifies new fleet support ships as 'warships'

By George Allison, UK Defence Journal September 23 2020

PREVIOUSLY the Government had argued that the new Fleet Solid Support Ships were not warships and as such, were eligible for international tendering rather than being restricted to British shipyards. The £1.5bn competition to build up to three Fleet Solid Support Ships was suspended last year and an update was due this autumn.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace told the Commons today “I intend to announce the procurement timetable for these warships in due course, aftermarket testing has completed”.

This is important because according to government policy, ‘warships’ must be built inside the United Kingdom.

The definition of warship used by the Government had been previously challenged by people from all sides of the political spectrum. For perspective, according to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea article 29:

“For the purposes of this Convention, “warship” means a ship belonging to the armed forces of a State bearing the external marks distinguishing such ships of its nationality, under the command of an officer duly commissioned by the government of the State and whose name appears in the appropriate service list or its equivalent, and manned by a crew which is under regular armed forces discipline.”

However, the National Shipbuilding Strategy defines warships as solely destroyers, frigates and aircraft carriers.

This definition was also highlighted during a debate on the topic in Parliament last year with Stuart Andrew, then Minister for Defence Procurement, saying the following about the Fleet Solid Support Ships:

“It is not a warship by definition, for the simple reason that the definition is based on the UK’s requirement to retain the ability to design, build and integrate frigates, destroyers and aircraft carriers for reasons of national security, ensuring that the complex nature of the construct is an important part of it from the very beginning. We will continue to have this argument—unions are coming to meet me very soon to discuss it.”

- Ross Murdoch, GMB National Officer and CSEU Chair, said: “It looks like the Government has finally acknowledged what GMB has always said – these are warships. There is no reason to now hide behind any treaty – they must be built in UK.”

The UK Defence Journal, SavetheRoyalNavy.org and other commentators as well as GMB and other shipbuilding unions long campaigned for the £1billion FSS contract to be given to UK shipyards – producing a report highlighting the estimated 6,700 jobs created or secured if the orders were kept in the UK.

Due to the aforementioned delays, the MoD expects that there will be a delay of between 18 and 36 months to the first new Fleet Solid Support Ship entering service. You can read more about this [here](#).

Carrier sails with most fifth gen jets ever deployed on a ship

By George Allison, UK Defence Journal Sept 21 2020



HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH will soon be joined by seven British destroyers, frigates and auxiliaries, plus other supporting units, to form a fully sovereign Carrier Strike Group, ready to fight on the surface and in the air, say the Royal Navy. Her complement of jets comes from two squadrons of F-35Bs, the RAF’s 617 Squadron (The Dambusters) and the US Marines Corps VMFA-211 (Wake Island Avengers).

The Royal Navy also say that With a total of 14 jets and eight Merlin helicopters, it’s the largest concentration of fighter jets to operate at sea from a Royal Navy carrier since HMS Hermes in 1983, and the largest air group of fifth generation fighters at sea anywhere in the world.

The Carrier Strike Group will be put through its paces off the north east coast of Scotland as part of Joint Warrior, NATO’s largest annual exercise.



Commodore Steve Moorhouse, above, Commander UK Carrier Strike Group, said in a press release: “The United Kingdom’s maritime renaissance has been unfolding over many years, as we introduced a new generation of ships, submarines and aircraft into service.

“But this marks the first time we have brought them together in a cohesive, potent, fighting force. HMS Queen Elizabeth will be operating with the largest air group of fifth generation fighters assembled anywhere in the world. Led by the Royal Navy, and backed by our closest allies, this new Carrier Strike Group puts real muscle back into NATO and sends a clear signal that the United Kingdom takes its global role seriously.”

617 Squadron Commanding Officer, Royal Navy Commander Mark Sparrow, was quoted as saying: “This is an incredibly exciting time for 617 Squadron as we begin a new era of partnership with the US Marine Corps building towards next year’s operational deployment with HMS Queen Elizabeth.

“You need to go back more than three decades to find the UK operating anything on this scale or complexity and this is a first for fifth-generation carrier capability. The era of big-deck, fast jet carrier operations is back.”

VMFA-211 arrived in the UK just under two weeks ago. Their Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Freshour USMC, was quoted as saying: “The Wake Island Avengers are ready in all respects to work with the British sailors and aircrew on board HMS Queen Elizabeth. We are looking forward to deploying alongside our British counterparts over the next few months, and we will work tirelessly as a part of this transatlantic naval force. We are proud to play such an important role in the generation of an allies’ carrier strike capability.”

- Captain James Blackmore, the UK’s Carrier Air Wing Commander, added: “We are going to learn a huge amount from operating F-35Bs at sea with the USMC, they have had them longer and we can share ideas and practices. “But this is much more than that; this is the trans-Atlantic alliance in action, demonstrating that two close allies can not only fly from each other’s carriers, but can fight alongside each other should we need to. This level of integration offers a decisive flexibility in times of crisis, conflict or war.”

The Royal Navy say that HMS Queen Elizabeth, along with her 1,680 sailors, aviators and marines, is due to return to her home port of Portsmouth next month.

BAE awarded modernisation contract for two US Navy warships

By George Allison, UK Defence Journal August 24, 2020

BAE Systems has received an \$83.5 million contract from the U.S. Navy to modernise destroyers USS Carney and USS Winston S. Churchill. The modernisation work will be performed sequentially at the company's shipyard in Jacksonville. The contracts include options that, if exercised, would bring the cumulative value to \$211.6 million.

According to the firm in a statement: "The USS Carney will be first in the shipyard, arriving in September 2020. The 23-year-old ship just returned from a six-year operational period in Rota, Spain, and will undergo extensive repair and upgrade work that will take more than 400 days to complete. The shipyard will drydock the ship and perform maintenance of the underwater hull, renovation of crew habitability spaces and upgrades to shipboard systems. The modernization is scheduled to be completed in November 2021.



The Winston S. Churchill will undergo a 390-day maintenance period when the ship arrives in June 2021. The shipyard's work aboard the 18-year-old ship will include drydocking, replacement of steel structures onboard and support of the electronic systems upgrades. The modernization of the Winston S. Churchill is scheduled to be completed in July 2022."

"The modernisation work aboard the Carney and Winston S. Churchill are significant for our Jacksonville maritime team and important for the service lives and mission capability of these combatants," said Tim Spratto, general manager of BAE Systems Jacksonville Ship Repair.

"The back-to-back sequencing of work is efficient and beneficial for our employees, our subcontractors and our Navy customer."

UK defence review should put British bidders first, say industry chiefs

By Peggy Hollinger, The Financial Times,

THE UK DEFENCE INDUSTRY is calling on ministers to prioritise spending on British-based companies to help drive a post-coronavirus, post-Brexit economic recovery. With new data seen by the FT showing annual spending on US-sourced defence programmes rising sharply in recent years, industry executives in the UK are now urging officials conducting a sweeping defence review — intended to shape Britain's priorities until 2030 — to allocate certain procurement to UK-based bidders.

“We want a competitive regime but also would like to see recognition that a significant number of our [UK] projects will never be put on the market in that way,” said one person involved in the discussions. The procurement process needed to give more recognition to bids delivering greater value to the UK in terms of jobs and economic prosperity, he said.

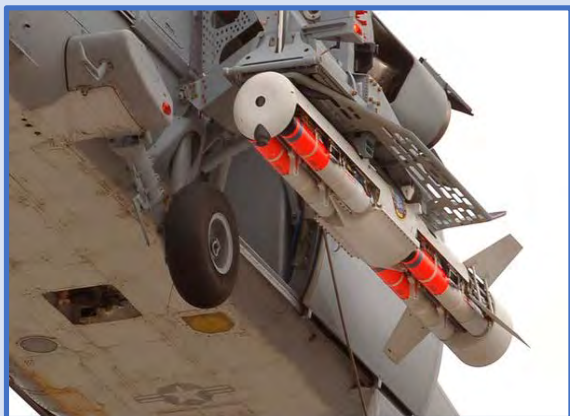
The campaign comes as Ministry of Defence data acquired by Defence Analysis, the industry newsletter and consultancy, show that roughly 20 per cent of 2019-20 procurement spending went on the five biggest US off-the-shelf programmes, up from 12 per cent in 2016-17.

In the past four years, in-year spending on those five programmes — the Apache AH-64E helicopter, E-7 Wedgetail radar aircraft, and P8 maritime patrol aircraft all from Boeing, General Atomic’s Protector surveillance drone, and Lockheed Martin’s F-35 stealth fighter jet — has risen from £763m to £1.4bn, according to Defence Analysis data.

- The UK’s total annual procurement budget, in contrast, rose by just 14 per cent during that period. “The Ministry of Defence, in procurement, are so separated from the country that they have one procurement policy — make America great again,” said Francis Tusa, editor of Defence Analysis. “There are a lot of sensible things they can buy in the UK.”

He cited the UK’s reluctance to order a next generation Typhoon fighter jet, equipped with the latest radar technology. Germany had already committed to the latest version of the European fighter, he said, but the Royal Air Force was not interested.

There were also questions over the imminent tender for two 40,000-tonne vessels, required to supply the Royal Navy’s two new aircraft carriers, with food, ammunition and other supplies. The Royal Navy recently indicated these vessels could go out to international tender, despite substantial industry and political pressure for the bidding to be limited to UK-based companies.



BAE awarded £87m contract by the US to deliver Archerfish mine neutralisers

By George Allison

THIS IS THE FOURTH consecutive Archerfish contract awarded to BAE Systems since 2003 and will see the firm deliver to the US Navy over the next

seven years. According to BAE Systems, Archerfish is a remote-controlled underwater mine neutraliser that can be launched and operated from a surface ship, helicopter or an unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV).

“Its fibre optic data link relays real-time, high resolution, low-light video and high frequency sonar pictures of targets of interest from its on-board sensors. The design reduces the time it takes to identify and neutralise targets, meaning clearance missions can be completed more quickly.

Archerfish also protects personnel by eliminating the need to put divers into the water. Archerfish is used by the US Navy’s MH-60S Helicopter squadrons (AN/ASQ-235) as part of the Airborne Mine Neutralisation capability, deployed from the Littoral Combat Ship.”

Under the new contract Archerfish will continue to support the US Navy in live mine clearance operations and also provide capability to conduct training exercises between now and 2027.

The contract also includes the supply of fibre optic spool kits, support equipment, surveys, repairs and programme management and support, which will be provided by the Archerfish project team based in Portsmouth, UK.

Dr Brooke Hoskins, Director of Products and Training Services for BAE Systems' Maritime Services business, said in a press statement:

"This contract builds on our strong partnership with the US Navy which has seen BAE Systems supporting its minesweeping operations for almost two decades. Archerfish not only helps to keep sailors safer; it also reduces the number and cost of mine clearance missions. Its world-leading capability and outstanding service with the US Navy makes Archerfish a highly attractive proposition to other major naval forces around the world."

Archerfish is manufactured in the UK at BAE Systems' Broad Oak facility in Portsmouth, Hampshire, and Hillend facility in Dunfermline, Fife. BAE also say that the contract with the US Department of Defense secures 30 highly skilled jobs in BAE Systems in Portsmouth and Fife and further jobs in the UK supply chain.

China's Media Influence has gone Global. So has the Pushback.



By Sarah Cook for The Diplomat. Sarah is a Senior Research Analyst at Freedom House and director of its China Media Bulletin. Beijing's campaign to control narratives about China the world over is attracting more attention — and opposition.

THE CHINESE Communist Party (CCP) and various Chinese government entities have long sought to influence public debate and media coverage about China around the world, a trend that has accelerated in recent years. Over the past month, a number of news reports and investigations, often by local journalists, have highlighted new evidence of how

Chinese government-linked actors impact global information flows via propaganda, censorship, surveillance, and control over infrastructure.

In response, various governments and technology firms have taken steps to undermine the negative effects CCP influence has on media and internet freedom. This article calls attention to some of these new developments.

In Southeast Asia, Thailand's cash-strapped media companies are increasingly relying on Chinese state media like the official newswire, Xinhua News Agency, to provide coverage on the global response to the coronavirus. But China's influence on Thai news precedes the pandemic, with at least a dozen outlets having inked partnerships with Xinhua and 2019 being named by the Thai government as the "ASEAN-China Year of Media Exchanges."

- Farther afield, according to Italian journalist Gabriel Carrer, writing at Formiche, coverage on Italy's public television of Chinese government assistance to the coronavirus-ravaged country has been three times greater than comparable coverage of U.S. government help. The coverage appears to have contributed to improved public opinion of China vis-à-vis the United States, according to recent polls.

Meanwhile, The Times of India reports that many videos on the Chinese-based app TikTok that discuss recent military tensions along the India-China border have been subject to "shadow bans," effectively hiding them from other users on the platform. Thus, according to the article, "#ladakhchinaborder, #chinaladakh, #chinainladakh are all hashtags that exist," but have "zero views and no link to the videos."

India has Tok-tok's largest user base, with over 150 million monthly active users. The events have given rise to further speculation that TikTok censors material critical of China.

A new report from the Washington D.C.-based Heritage Foundation claims that Chinese companies involved in renovating government structures and building telecommunication networks across Africa may be involved in surveilling both African and U.S. officials and business leaders.

The study found, among other things, that Chinese companies had done construction work on at least 186 sensitive government buildings across Africa, had built 14 "secure" telecommunications networks, and had provided computers to governments in 35 African countries. It urges U.S. and African government officials to take precautions with any meetings or content they would not want accessed by Beijing.

- Speaking of the United States, in early June, Google's Threat Analysis Group announced that a China-linked hacking group had conducted phishing attacks against the campaign of U.S. presidential candidate Joe Biden. Although they reported that the assaults appeared not to have been successful, it is the first indication of China-based actors targeting the campaign, either for the purposes of influencing the presidential contest, or to gain intelligence on a potential incoming administration.

And on June 10, Axios reported that the U.S.-based video conferencing company Zoom had shuttered the account of Chinese American democracy advocate Zhou Fengsuo after he organized a virtual commemoration of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre using the application. The account was reinstated after the news report was published. Zoom has done extensive product development in China, and later admitted that the closure had been triggered by a request from the Chinese government.

As China's influence grows, however, so too does the pushback from other countries. Regulators in the United Kingdom have found that the China Global Television Network (CGTN), the international arm of China's state broadcaster, repeatedly violated broadcasting rules through its biased coverage of the Hong Kong protest movement. The channel could face millions of dollars' worth of fines and the revocation of its broadcasting license.



On May 28, the BBC reported that an investigation they conducted found 1,200 apparently automated or hijacked social media accounts that had amplified negative messaging about critics of China's handling of the coronavirus outbreak, while also applauding the Chinese government's

response. After they shared their findings with the relevant companies, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube removed hundreds of the accounts.

On June 4, Facebook announced that it would begin labelling pages and posts from media outlets "wholly or partially under the editorial control of their government," a decision that could impact the promotion of Chinese state media pages on the platform, which have tens of millions of followers worldwide. The company said that in the coming months it would also begin labelling ads from such accounts and blocking them from placing ads in the United States in advance of the country's November 2020 presidential election.

In late May, Twitter added fact-checking warnings to two tweets sent in March by China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Zhao Lijian, which shared conspiracy theories asserting that the United States had brought the coronavirus to Wuhan.

The Chinese Party-state continues to engage in a massive campaign to influence media outlets and news consumers around the world, especially with regard to their understanding of the coronavirus outbreak.

- While some aspects of this effort are in line with traditional public diplomacy, many others are covert, coercive, and potentially corrupt. The strategies being pursued have long-term implications, particularly as the CCP and its international affiliates gain greater influence over key portions of the information infrastructure in various countries. The potential future impact of Beijing's practices should not be underestimated.

It is encouraging to see governments, technology firms, and civil society actors in a growing number of countries exploring avenues for protecting media freedom, increasing transparency, and countering disinformation efforts by Chinese government-linked actors. Their efforts will not only address Beijing's encroachments, but also strengthen democratic institutions and independent media against other domestic and international threats.

Such action may require considerable political will, given Beijing's tendency to mete out economic reprisals. But it is increasingly clear that allowing the authoritarian dimensions of CCP media influence campaigns to expand unchecked carries its own costs.

Putin's overweening depiction of Russian victory in WW2

By Andrew Fedynsk , Ukrainian Weekly May 1, 2020

THERE'S HISTORY AND THERE'S MYTH. What's the difference? Historians peruse documents, ledgers, letters, newspapers, memoirs, oral accounts, films, photographs to create a record of what happened. Myth is its essence, distilling it all into a narrative a nation, religion, etc. universally accepts, almost on a subconscious level, to celebrate events and heroes with music, poems, icons, bank notes, paintings and lullabies mothers sing to new-borns.

World War II was a global catastrophe like no other. There are thousands upon thousands of books in which every day is documented: huge military operations; horrific, heroic and criminal experiences

of millions who died and those who survived. There are movies, memoirs, artwork, graveyards, museums and untold numbers of shoeboxes with family memorabilia.

Last November, Russian President Vladimir Putin invited President Donald Trump and other global leaders to join him for the May 9 parade on Red Square featuring tanks, missiles and columns of troops saluting Russia's president as he and the country commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe.

President Trump said he would like to attend, but at a minimum would send a high-level delegation. Others, citing Russia's aggression against Ukraine, declined.

With the demise of the Soviet Union and its ubiquitous Lenin commemorations, October Revolution and May Day parades, the World War II victory celebration is Russia's biggest holiday, and Mr. Putin promotes it to validate his country's greatness and justify his rule as steward over its historic legacy and promises for a shining future. Doing so, he's creating a modern-day myth: that Russia heroically delivered humanity from Nazi tyranny while the rest of the world stood by.

The Russian World War II myth relies on history even as it obliterates it. The Red Army did indeed destroy the Nazi Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front, marching all the way to Berlin. That's the history, justifying for Mr. Putin the massive choreography of a Red Square parade.

But that myth also relies on a network of lies and taboos. It's basically forbidden to write about the Hitler-Stalin Pact that launched the war. Shamelessly and absurdly, Mr. Putin blames Poland for World War II, the prime victim in September 1939.

The massive Lend Lease assistance America provided Stalin starting in 1941 – munitions, food, logistics, intelligence – is forgotten. Mention of the NKVD murders of Ukrainian, Polish and Baltic military and civilian leadership is also banned. Ukrainians' collective response to the Nazi invasion in June 1941 is utterly distorted. Ukrainians did indeed welcome Germans as liberators. Entire Soviet armies in Kyiv and elsewhere surrendered without resistance.

Why defend Joseph Stalin, who had engineered the Holodomor, launched the Great Terror and decimated the Soviet military with executions in the 1930s?

History, of course, records that the Germans came not as liberators but as tyrants and oppressors no different than Stalin, seizing grain and livestock, forcing young people into slave labour. They murdered Jews, executed those who resisted, and subjected the nation to slaughter and ruin.

In less than a year, the people turned against them, especially in western Ukraine where the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists provided the military, social and political infrastructure to form the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). It's an amazing story: how a people beleaguered by both the Nazis and the Soviets maintained tens of thousands of partisans in the field for nearly a decade – a staggering accomplishment dwarfing the famed French Resistance, a Ukrainian story yet to be told in all its complexity.

- Crafting Mr. Putin's overweening depiction of Russia defeating Nazi Germany, Kremlin myth-makers downplay the contribution of non-Russian peoples in the war even though millions of them served in the Red Army.

Worse: even as they deny Stalin's collaboration with Hitler (1939-1941), Russian propagandists echo their Soviet-era counterparts, depicting World War II Ukrainians, especially the UPA, as collaborators with Germany, allowing Mr. Putin's warped politics to smear the Orange Revolution (2004-2005) and the Euro-Maidan Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014) as "neo-Nazi" manifestations, inspired and funded by the United States and other Western countries.

So, here's the history. Early in the war, Stalin effectively acknowledged that Ukrainians would not fight for the Soviet Union and made a strategic pivot: the struggle was for Ukraine. Posters were produced with an angry Taras Shevchenko admonishing Ukrainians to "sprinkle liberty with the evil blood of tyrants."

National radio replaced the Soviet national anthem with Danylo Kryzhanivsky's stirring music to Shevchenko's "The Dnipro Roars and Groans." The Red Army awarded military medals featuring Bohdan Khmelnytsky. Volodymyr Sosiura's "Love Ukraine as You Love the Sun" also achieved anthem-like proportions, inspiring Ukrainians, including millions in the Red Army.

In 1944, with the Wehrmacht being driven back to Berlin, the UPA focused its independence fight on the Soviet Union. The Kremlin countered, awarding Kyiv with its own Foreign Ministry



and a separate Commissariat for National Defense. Historian Yaroslav Bilinsky in “The Second Soviet Republic” (1964) contends that was to undercut the UPA’s appeal so Moscow could argue that Soviet Ukraine was already a sovereign state.

No need for the UPA. And indeed, months after the end of the war, Soviet Ukraine became a charter member of the United Nations. Nearly half a century later in 1990-1991, its hitherto



hollow and subservient institutions were decisive as officials moved the country toward independence.

The UPA? By 1950, it was pretty much crushed, its warriors, civic/cultural leaders and social supporters killed, exiled or blended into Soviet society, or having escaped. And yet, it remained a critical force. Solzhenitsyn in the “GULAG Archipelago” recounts how young Ukrainians in the early 1950s, fresh off the guerrilla trails, were horrified by the

slavery in Siberian labour camps and “reached for their knives,” staging uprisings and largely dismantling the Stalin-era GULAG.

World War II? There are millions of stories but three major narratives: the Holocaust; rallying Soviet Ukraine against the Nazis; rallying Western Ukraine to the UPA. Each from different circumstances contributed to what we have today: a free and sovereign Ukrainian republic that happens to have a Jewish president. What’s needed now is a national myth – in the most positive sense of that word – one to weave the different social/political/ethnic strands into a unified narrative of Ukraine’s heroic stance in World War II. That’s up to historians, musicians, novelists, politicians and others to forge. I’m confident we’ll get there.

Russia? The coronavirus spared us from having to endure Mr. Putin’s mendacious myth. The May 9 parade was cancelled.

UK 'encourages' Russian adversaries by displaying 'wholly inadequate' response to online threats

By Danielle Sheridan, The Telegraph Political Correspondent 7 August 2020

THE UK is responsible for “encouraging” Russian adversaries by displaying a “wholly inadequate” response to online threats, a former MI6 officer has said. Christopher Steel, who wrote the 2016 dossier about alleged links between Donald Trump and Russia, accused Britain of “not catching up quickly enough” with the vulnerabilities created by modern technology which are then ‘exploited’ by the Russians.

“Retaliation has been wholly inadequate to this new phenomenon, this new threat to our way of life which has encouraged them on,” Mr Steele said. “It’s encouraged the hawks in the regime to push for more interference rather than less.”

Mr Steele added that the UK had “been generally behind the curve” due to the fact “the threat and the way it’s carried out has been two steps ahead of everybody else”, however conceded that “it’s a difficult thing to counter because it’s often done remotely”.

In an interview with Tory MP Damian Collins on the Infotagion podcast, Mr Steele added that Russian influence “is not being properly countered because of a lack of experience and imagination”.

He concluded there was potentially “a lack of skill in the core institutions of government where there’s been a lot of brain drain, if you like, of people out of government, out of the intelligence services and diplomacy, because they’re moving into the private sector”.

Tobias Ellwood, Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, said: “The government should listen to Mr Steele”, who was highlighting “the changing character of conflict”.

“It’s all constant political competition beneath the threshold of full out military engagement,” Mr Ellwood told The Daily Telegraph.

“He’s right, we aren’t adapting quickly enough to the consequence of how these threats affect our lives. It’s no longer just about building up conventional capabilities but shorter war operations.”

He cautioned that misinformation campaigns, political interference, cyber theft and breaches of cyber security were “all things to cause our economy and society to question its own confidence “Subversion is something we haven’t focused on, we’ve focused more on the heavy blue on red encounter, rather than the clandestine, less attributable attacks that are happening on a daily basis and we need to get better in building resilience in these areas.”

Mr Steele said that Russian interference is "designed" to push political debate to the extremes in order to undermine people's "faith and trust" in democracy, adding Brexit was a clear example of how divided the country has become on what used to be consensus issues.

"I'm very concerned (in ensuring) national security issues can be bipartisan, and that we can keep our politics moderate and mainstream, for the most part, despite Russia and other

BOOK Reviews



foreign actors' attempts to polarise us."

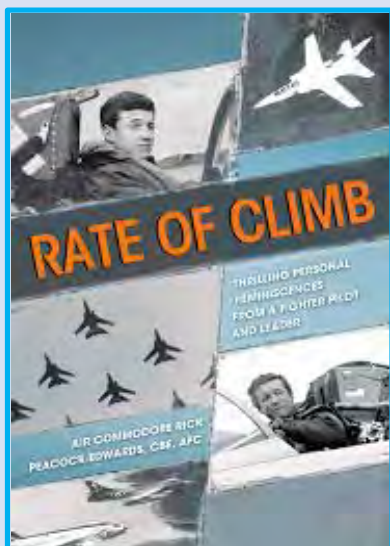
Rate of Climb: Thrilling personal reminiscences from a fighter pilot and leader.

By P&S Club Vice President, Air Commodore Rick Peacock Edwards.

Published by Grub Street. ISBN 978-1-911-62146.

AS THE SON of a distinguished wartime fighter pilot, it is clear from the early description of family life in this memoir by Rick Peacock-Edwards that flying was in his blood. With his father remaining in the post-war RAF, Rick's early years were spent in Britain, but he completed his education at public school in South Africa, where his family moved in 1958. The school motto 'Explore, Educate, Excel' was clearly apposite to his subsequent career.

In 1964, the 20-year-old was accepted for pilot training with the RAF Defence Liaison Staff in Pretoria. Unlike many senior officers of his generation, he did not attend the RAF College, Cranwell, but was a direct entrant cadet via the Aircrew Officer Training School at South Cerney in Gloucestershire, from where Peacock-Edwards was commissioned in May 1965, beginning flying training soon afterwards. It is an interesting contrast to today's tyros that he arrived for operational conversion on the Lightning little over two years later.



It was at Coltishall in Norfolk that the author began his long career as a fighter pilot in the last few months of Fighter Command's existence and over half of this engrossing book is devoted to those years. As Flying Officer Rick Peacock Edwards, usually known as 'RPE', he arrived on his first posting with 92 Squadron at Gutersloh, West Germany, in early 1968. The Cold War was at its height and the station was just a short flight from the East German border.

Rick walks the reader through his early days on 'Battle Flight', where two aircraft were held at five-minute readiness to scramble to identify any unknown contacts: "The intercepts that followed were invariably interesting because the light aircraft would be flying at around 100kts and our minimum speed was closer to 180kts.

However, when a light aircraft sees a large, fully armed fighter pass close by, they get the message and we used to get their number which was then reported to the authorities." After three years in Germany, he was posted back to the Lightning conversion unit as a tactics

instructor and, by the end of this tour two years later, had amassed an impressive 1,500 hours on the notoriously short-legged aircraft.

He then trained as a Qualified Flying Instructor and completed a tour instructing budding pilots on the diminutive Gnat. As he notes: 'I found [this] both satisfying and very rewarding' He then trained as a Qualified Flying Instructor and completed a tour instructing budding pilots on the diminutive Gnat. As he notes: 'I found [this] both satisfying and very rewarding'.

Promoted at the end of this tour, he returned to the front, flying the 'Mighty Phantom' as the Executive Officer of 111 Squadron at Leuchars, Scotland. As in Germany, the two squadrons based there held QRA (quick reaction alert), but their 'prey' was more formidable: Soviet long-range bombers encroaching the UK Air Defence Region

. Any intruder had to be intercepted, with the Phantoms usually accompanied by a tanker. Missions were long and sometimes arduous, especially given the often-unpredictable weather in the squadron's 'patch'. The day-to-day activities of an operational air defence squadron in the chilliest period of the Cold War is vividly described.

Following a ground tour and attending the staff college Rick was promoted to wing commander of 229 OCU. Given his background as an instructor and operational pilot, he was well placed to introduce the new Tornado F.2 to service.

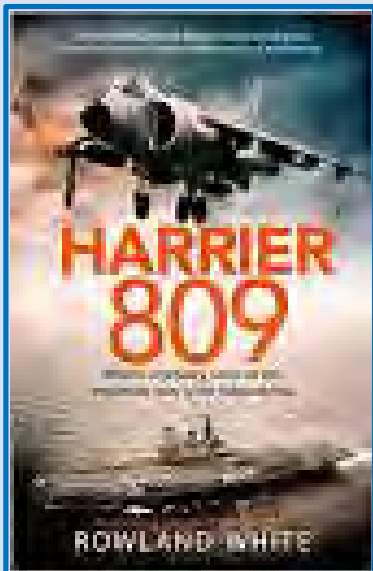
He takes the reader through the excitement and frustrations of flying this new aircraft, an association he continued when appointed as station commander at Leeming with three operational Tornado F.3 squadrons under his command. The highlight of this period was commanding the RAF detachment at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, an appropriate end to his operational career.

Clearly an aviator's aviator, the author writes with humour and candour about the thrills and tribulations of his time as a front-line pilot and his important staff posts. However, the most poignant part of the book is the dedication to 21 of the author's friends and colleagues who were killed in flying accidents — a timely reminder of the high cost paid by the RAF during the years of 'peace'.

Harrier 809: Britain's Legendary Jump Jet and the Untold Story of the Falklands War

By Rowland White, Bantam, pp. 434, £20

'THE WORLD,' Mrs Thatcher was reported to have said, 'is full of ships.' With this comment, unlike in many other things, she lacked a common touch. I do not know what she thought about planes, still less jump jets, but no doubt she would have shared the sentiment of



Rowland White's Harrier 809 about their pilots: brave, selfless individuals who showed daring and ingenuity in overcoming the numerically superior Argentine air force to steal victory against the odds.

White is an aviation enthusiast, knowledgeable about the technical and logistical challenges fighter pilots face and adept at crafting a fast-paced narrative. His previous book, Vulcan 607, recounted the achievements of the V-bomber pilots who bombed the runway at Port Stanley, the Falkland Islands capital, a feat of nerves and engineering made possible by complex precision mid-air refuelling.

Harrier 809 focuses on Britain's Sea Harriers, a story already told by Lieutenant Commander Nigel 'Sharkey' Ward, the commander of 801 Squadron. For Ward, bureaucratic infighting and senior commanders' ignorance of the Harrier's capability cost British lives. White's book is perhaps partly a counterpoint. Ward, it seems, did not always get on with the more measured Lieutenant Commander Tim Gedge, the commander of 809 squadron, the unit around which most of White's action revolves.

The narrative is also panoramic. The first two parts of the book chronicle the hasty revival of 809 Naval Air Squadron to bolster the two squadrons already sent: the challenges in securing their place among the Task Force, of creating a leadership team, finding experienced pilots, conducting a small amount of necessary training, procuring equipment and sailing south. All this is told against a somewhat Boy's Own perspective on the Falklands war as a miniature Battle of Britain.

In the final parts of the book, White's narrative is gripping and hits home with hair-raising details of the dangers confronting the British Task Force. Two pilots went missing, assumed to have collided in mid-air in heavy fog. Another was never found after his jet exploded. A further pilot was taken prisoner. Another crashed after cluster bombing Goose Green before 2 Para's attack, and evaded capture by running fast and hiding in a farmhouse. The pilots were men in their forties, often with wives and young children. They understood the sacrifice they might have to make.

White gives powerful accounts of Argentine breaches of the Task Force's defences. Two Exocet missiles struck the Merchant Navy ship *Atlantic Conveyor*. The pilots who fired them perhaps believed they had locked on to one of Britain's aircraft carriers. That was the real prize for the Argentine air force, as loss of one carrier could have jeopardised Britain's war effort. Captain Ian North was the last to leave the stricken vessel. He did not survive the descent into the life rafts, claimed instead by the freezing South Atlantic, his body never recovered.

The historian in me would like to know how White accessed not just dialogue but also the thoughts of men under stress nearly 40 years ago. ('You fool, he berated himself, as he flicked the Harrier into another hard turn to port.') This is not a book that makes plain its source material: there are no footnotes or bibliography.

Rather, it is a military adventure, written with expertise, for those who share these passions. It is a tale of initiative, skill and courage, of pushing beyond the rules.

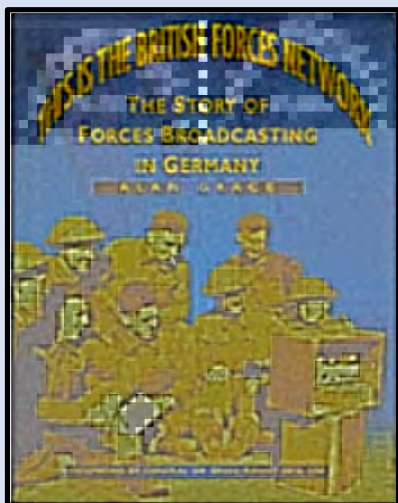
It is not about dull and petty politics. The defence secretary John Nott — unpopular because the 1981 defence review proposed to cut the carrier *HMS Invincible* — apparently made 'gonadal' noises in discussion with a US counterpart about the durability of the fleet.

Nor is it really a book about taking hard choices, unlike some of the humbler memoirs written by senior military commanders. This war was fraught with difficult decisions, but for the men depicted here, the right path was often the one that might have appeared the most improbable. How to ensure British air defence would not shoot down their own Harriers? Ban the Harriers, naturally, from flying in an imaginary box above the landings. 'I don't give a damn about your bloody rules,' Admiral Woodward is reported as saying. 'This is how it is going to be done.' How to protect the Sidewinder missiles from too many soakings? Dry them out in *Invincible's* bread ovens and cover them in cling film, of course.

Harrier 809 is a story of masculine skill and daring, of technological prowess and of imagination — theirs, for the outlook to do what they did; and the author's, to piece it together like this. The British armed services probably would not function in quite the same way without this under-acknowledged but un-hard-headed element: love of its machines, love of its men and love of its history.

Tracing the history of British Forces Broadcasting

By P&S Member Alan Grace.



IN DECEMBER 1944, with the war still raging in NW Europe and the Germans about to launch their ill-fated counteroffensive in the Ardennes, four Mobile Broadcasting Units left Tilbury docks for Ostend.

Their role was to relay the Allied Expeditionary Forces Programme to the advancing British and Canadian armies.

But with the end of the war in Europe five months later came the need to find a permanent home for these roving broadcasting units.

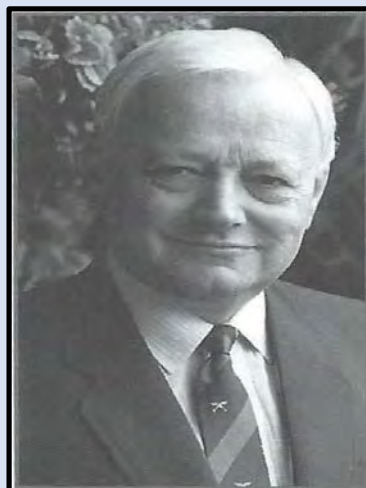
'This is the British Forces Network traces the story of the British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS), as these units became, from a harem in Algiers in 1944 to the Musikhalle in Hamburg, and on to the new headquarters of forces radio and television in Herford for Service Sound and Vision Corporation (SSVC) in the 1990s.

Throughout its history, BFBS has covered major events in Germany, ranging from the Berlin Airlift to the massacre at the Munich Olympics and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall.

Many presenters, who have since become household names, began their broadcasting careers with BFBS, including Nigel Davenport, Raymond Baxter, Nick Bailey and Sarah Kennedy.

The programmes of BFBS became a fundamental part of service life and reached into NAAFI canteens, aircraft hangars, Army workshops and married quarters the length and breadth of Germany.

At its peak, the 'Two Way Family Favourites' show had an audience of 20 million listeners, and its former presenters include such well-known names as Cliff Michelmore, Sandi Jones, Jean Metcalfe, Bill Crozier and Dennis Scuse.



In 'This is the British Forces Network ...', Alan Grace, who spent 36 years with BFBS, traces the history of forces broadcasting in Germany, drawing on interviews with past and present members of BFBS, archive photographs, scripts and many previously unpublished documents.

For example, he mixes stories of LAC Geraint Evans of the BFN Music Department with Barry Davies' introduction to sports broadcasting, bringing out the humorous side of forces broadcasting. For thousands of British servicemen and women and their families,

'This is the British Forces Network ...' will evoke memories of postings to BAOR and RAF Germany. It will also appeal to successive post-war generations of Germans who tuned in to the sound of BFBS as they toiled to rebuild their country in the chill of the Cold War era.

ALAN GRACE joined BFN Cologne in 1957 as a sports reporter/ announcer and held various posts with BFBS in Aden, London, Germany, Cyprus and Hong Kong. In 1982 he set up and produced the Falkland Request Links and during the 1991 Gulf War he worked on satellite links for forces broadcasting. On his retirement in 1993 he was Head of Broadcast Administration with SS V C. Alan is a member of the Orders and Medals Research Society of Great Britain.

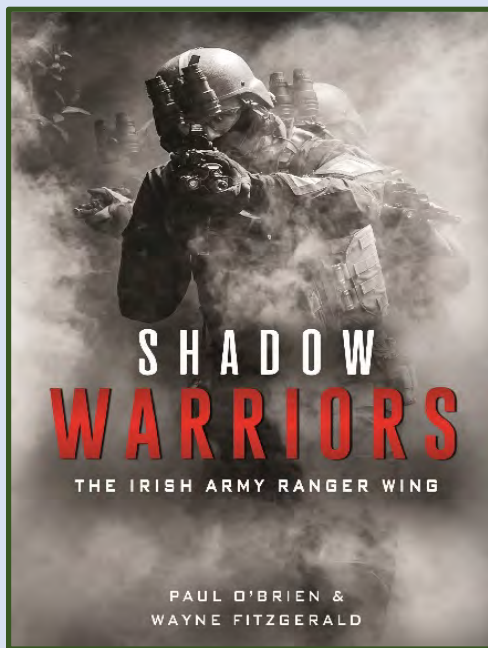
Shadow Warriors lifts the lid on Ireland's Special Forces

By P&S member Wayne Fitzgerald, Irish Defence Force

A NEW BOOK *Shadow Warriors: The Irish Army Ranger Wing* published in April 2020 which lifts the lid on this secretive special forces unit and is the first and only authoritative account that looks at their inception, their advanced training and a look at their operations at home and overseas – without breaching their operational procedures or tactics, which still remain secret.

In March 1980, the Irish Defence Forces' Special Forces Unit the Army Ranger Wing or ARW was established - this year marks their 40th anniversary. The ARW was officially designated as 'Sciathán Fianóglach an Airm' as there is no English translation of 'Fianóglach' the internationally recognised designation of 'Ranger' is used. The word

'Fianóglach' links the traditions of the ARW to 'Na Fianna', the legendary Irish warriors, and also, with Óglaigh na hÉireann or Irish Defence Forces. "Glaine ár gCroí, Neart ár nGéag, Agus beart de réir ár mbriathar." "The cleanliness of our hearts, The strength of our limbs, And our commitment to our promise."



What do they do? The ARW's roles are divided into conventional warfare, i.e. offensive operations behind enemy lines, like long-range patrols (LRP), raids, ambushes, sabotage, counter-insurgency, and other tasks, and specialist aid to the civil power (ATCP) in anti-terrorist taskings including anti-hijack, hostage rescue, airborne and seaborne interventions, close protection (CP) of VIPs and counter terrorist/subversive threats, amongst others.

Army Ranger Wing's Special Operations Force Qualification or SOFQ Course is open to all serving members of the Defence Forces, serving in the Army, Naval Service or Air Corps both male and female. The SOFQ is a 36-week modular training course that requires a high level of physical fitness and mental fitness. The SOFQ syllabus is designed to test and assess all aspects of the candidate's character, military skills, ability and general suitability to become a member of the ARW.

Successful completion provides the potential unit member with all the skills and knowledge

necessary to function in the role of a Special Operations Force (SOF) assault team operator. The failure rate is very high, with only a small percentage make the cut to be the 'best of the best'. The ARW train hard and continuously work on their SOF tactics, techniques, and procedures or TTPs. Where they use the unit's now 40-years' of evolving knowledge and experience of operating at home and overseas, along with their cooperation with other security services and foreign special forces units.

ARW assault team operators are held in a state of readiness 24/7, 365 days of the year, where operators are on call to their command centre in the Curragh Camp, Co Kildare. Operators are put into platoons and teams as per their skill sets. They are constantly training and upskilling in all different types of special forces tactics like HALO parachuting, amphibious assault craft, fast-roping from a helicopter, sniping and assaulting in their Ford F-350 Special Reconnaissance Vehicles (SRV). Which other members of the Defence Forces can only hope of doing, someday, if they pass SOFQ.

The ARW started out in the early 1980s on operations during the Troubles, conducting patrols and manning Observation Posts or OPs while watching subversive activities along the Border area with Northern Ireland, right up until the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. They are also on hand for ATCP duties with An Garda Síochána, like the operation involved in the kidnapping of Don Tidy in 1983.

Most recently they would have provided snipers in air support and on the ground as Close Protection to VIP visits such as HM Queen Elizabeth II and other royals and other visiting heads of state like US President Donald Trump and US Vice President Michael Pence in June and September 2019.

As some might know, the Defence Forces have an unbroken record of 62 years of peacekeeping service with the UN since 1958. Individual members of the ARW will have served overseas during the unit's 40-years of operations, but they cut their teeth as a unit in Somalia in September 1993 just before the Black Hawk Down incident in October 1993, where 18 US Rangers operating independently of UN, were killed.

From there, the ARW has served as an initial entry force to missions such as East Timor 1999, Liberia 2003, Chad 2008, up to their present mission in Mali since September 2019.

Two ARW teams were deployed in a response to an upsurge in violence in northern Mali, which is led by Al Qaeda affiliated militant groups.

The ARW teams are conducting long-range reconnaissance patrols, with direct action. This requires speed, mobility and flexibility, the ARW have continuously trained for these types of mission. The UN's MINUSMA mission is considered by security experts as its most dangerous.

Since July 2013, 216 MINUSMA peacekeepers and law enforcement personnel have been killed, and another 360+ seriously injured (as of May 2020). In February 2020, three Irish ARW SOF operators suffered minor injuries when an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated near their vehicle while conducting a patrol in eastern Mali.



More ARW operatives are currently training for the UN approved German-led EU Battlegroup, which is due to go on operational standby for six months soon. If the Battlegroup were to be called into action the Irish contingent would only be deployed with the Irish government's 'triple-lock' authorisation. To date, no EU Battlegroup has been deployed.

The ARW missions and operations are not well known or regularly discussed within the media, nor are the identities of ARW operatives, who remain in the shadows in order to protect themselves and that of the unit. Thus, the unit and its members are shrouded in secrecy both within the Defence Forces and to the public.

About the authors: Paul O'Brien, a military historian, works for the Office of Public Works at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham. An author of 16 books,

Paul has written extensively on the military strategy of the 1916 Rising, as well as the British Army in Ireland. Two of his books, *Blood on the Streets* and *Crossfire*, were turned into the critically acclaimed drama-documentary *A Terrible Beauty*. He lives in Santry, Dublin with his wife, daughter and two cats.

Wayne Fitzgerald joined the Defence Forces in 1990, serving initially with the 5 Inf Bn, in his 30+ year career he has worked in a number of roles within the Army and Air Corps. In 2011 he was detached to Defence Forces HQ to work on www.military.ie, and in May 2011 he was appointed editor of *An Cosantóir* (The Defender) The Defence Forces

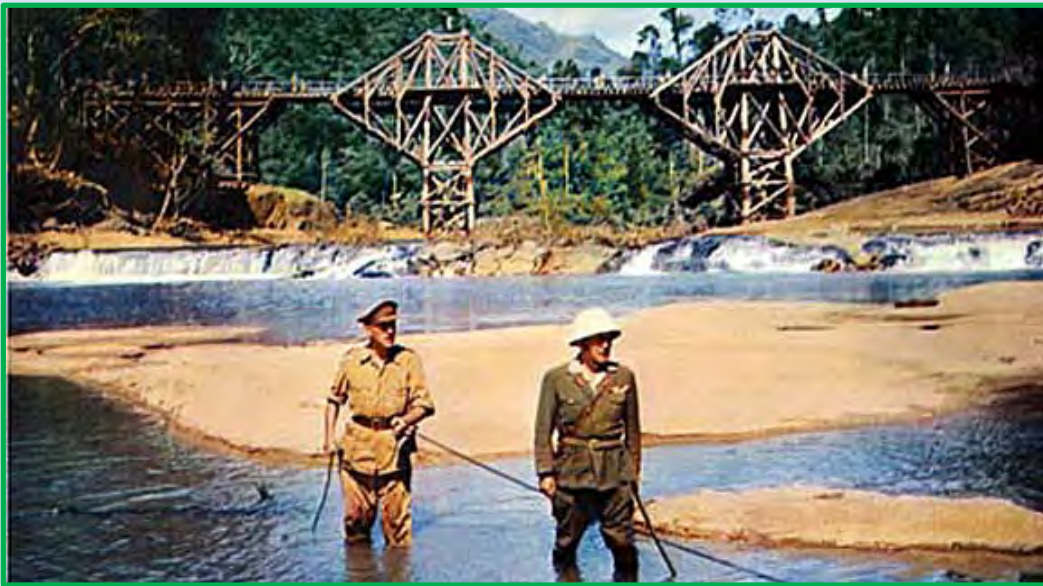


Why the War Office hated 'inauthentic' Bridge on the River Kwai

By Anita Singh, The Telegraph Arts and Entertainment Editor, August 11 2020

THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI is regarded by many as one of the great British films of the 20th century. But newly released documents reveal that

the War Office had misgivings about its release, believing the depiction of British prisoners of war cooperating with their Japanese captors "would not go down well with the British public".



The film failed to “authentically portray the behaviour and conduct of British officers”, the War Office said, and bore little relation to the truth. The comments were made as part of correspondence with Sam Spiegel, the Hollywood producer, who was seeking RAF cooperation in making the 1957 film.

Set in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in Burma, it starred Sir Alec Guinness as Lt Col Nicolson, and Sessue Hayakawa as the commandant Col Saito. Ordered to work on the Burma Railway, Nicolson initially insisted that officers were exempt from forced labour under the Geneva Convention. Ultimately, however, he took leadership of the task, deciding that it could boost morale among his men and demonstrate the superiority of the British.

The story was fictional, based on the novel by Pierre Boulle. In real life, the officer at the bridge in question was Lt Col Philip Toosey, pictured below left. Former PoWs say he never worked alongside the Japanese, and attempted to delay progress with acts of sabotage.



In a letter, Maj A G Close, working in the War Office's PR department, wrote: “I do not think much of this story. In the first instance it is quite untrue and only very occasionally resembles the facts as they were at the time. I am perhaps biased as I worked for three-and-a-half years on this particular railway.

“I have however asked independent people to read the script and they agree with me that it would not go down well with the British public.”

The War Office eventually agreed to RAF cooperation but said it was “not entirely happy about this film story, which does contain certain inaccuracies, and which does not, in our opinion, always authentically portray the behaviour and conduct of British officers”.

Others who strongly disapproved of the film included Lt Gen Arthur Ernest Percival, who commanded British forces during the Malaya campaign and became chairman of the Far East Prisoners of War (Fepow) committee.

In a letter made public by the National Archives and reported in The Guardian, Lt Gen Percival said: “The subsequent picture of the bridge being built under the British Colonel’s directions in a most efficient manner is however a very false one.

“It would have been very wrong for prisoners-of-war to have willingly done this because it would have been contrary to their duty. Our members are as a body justifiably proud of their conduct as prisoners-of-war. They suffered a great deal for it, and they would now deeply resent the presentation of any film which tended to misrepresent and cast aspersions on their conduct. On their behalf, I am writing to ask that the Film Censor may be requested to prohibit the showing of this film.”

The film was released in 1957 and went on to win seven Oscars for best picture, director, actor, adapted screenplay, cinematography, film editing and original music score.

Those who enjoyed the film included Lt Col Toosey, according to his family. His son, Patrick, told the BBC in 2017 that his father - who later became Brigadier Sir Philip Toosey - thought the film was “good theatre but totally removed from reality”.

Talking Pictures TV: the story behind the must-watch UK movies channel

Sarah Philip, Film Stories, digs into the story of the British film television channel that’s becoming a quiet sensation.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME you saw a British black and white film on any of the five main UK terrestrial channels? A few weeks ago? A few months? Even if you do, it’s probably a film that’s been repeated a thousand times before.

We’re at a point where even specialist movie channels like Film 4 only show one or two classic films a day, and they’re not always British. As for subscription TV, TCM tends to screen American classics.

But one channel’s bucking the trend. Talking Pictures TV showcases black and white British films. Over four years since its launch in 2015, it’s become one of the biggest film channels in the UK. Today, it attracts an audience of over two million viewers a week (and that was before the current lockdown). And it deserves every single one of them.

The success of Talking Pictures TV is down to Noel Cronin, his daughter Sarah and son-in-law Neill. They’re a family that’s worked in film distribution for years. Whilst the technical work is carried out by specialists, everything else is done by them in-house. Quite literally. The Cronin’s run Talking Pictures TV from their house in Hertfordshire.

They schedule the running order, acquire new films and carry out the day-to-day mechanics of running the channel at home. Films are always bought as part of a package from places like the BBC and Fremantle. A single package can cost £200,000 or more. Noel Cronin says that choosing what to buy is “based on suitability for the channel and then price”. They’re always thinking ahead and try to refresh their titles, so viewers only see the same films about three times a year.

British black and white films are the main focus of Talking Pictures TV. But it also broadcasts older TV shows and documentaries, and screens both classic American films and productions in colour from the UK and US.

With Talking Pictures TV, the Cronin’s wanted to tap into the nostalgia market that had been increasingly ignored on the small screen. Noel has been passionate about buying up the rights of older films for years. He started out as a post boy for film company Rank. He then edited cinema ads and public information films in the 70s and got involved in film distribution.

Over 20 years ago, he set up Renown Pictures to buy as many older British films as possible. He then distributed their rights to terrestrial channels.

When those channels started losing interest, he had to do something different. With the support of Sarah and Neill, he started licensing films for DVD release. The orders flooded in. You couldn't anticipate how many people were thrilled to find movies they hadn't seen in years.

It was the spark that set the Cronin's on the path to creating their own TV channel. They faced a rocky road ahead. Cronin reveals that it took "faith and self-investment". They tried writing business plan after business plan to secure investment. But no one was interested in putting



money forward for a channel that focused on black and white films.

Thus, they took the plunge and they forged ahead on their own. After all their setbacks, Talking Pictures TV finally launched in 2015 on Sky. The Cronin's had no budget for advertising, so they had to get creative.

They used social media to get more publicity and gained traction in early morning slots when most channels were still showing teleshopping. Many viewers switched on in the morning and continued watching all day. The channel quickly became popular. In a few months, they'd managed to get it listed on Freeview.

The variety of films on offer is what's kept so many people watching. You can watch a forgotten box office hit from a big studio one day and a B movie the next.

Before Talking Pictures TV, no one could have dreamt that a low-budget 1948 film like Ivan Barnett's *The Fall Of The House Of Usher* would ever be screened again. There's also a chance to see actors we know in unfamiliar roles. Barbara Windsor plays a woman torn between two men in *Sparrows Can't Sing*. She's sexy, troubled, funny, immoral and decent, all at the same time. Quite a departure from tough matriarch Peggy Mitchell in *EastEnders* and the flirty young girl from the *Carry-On* films.

As for Ronald Reagan, it's fascinating to see him on screen at all, particularly in an Anglo-American film, like *The Hasty Heart*.

The TV shows and documentaries Talking Pictures TV broadcasts are equally interesting. Every day, the channel shows at least two episodes of vintage British TV. Two of the most popular are *Gideon's Way* and *Scotland Yard*. Cronin believes they've been the best two shows he's bought.



Gideon's Way is a 60s drama that focuses on Commander Gideon in both his work and family life. Scotland Yard is a little different. It's a series of standalone episodes that focus on real cases but with actors playing fictionalised versions of real people. Scotland Yard actually predates our current obsession with true crime series by over 60 years.

As for documentaries, the most well received are short films called 'Glimpses'. Cronin schedules Glimpses in between major features a couple of days a week. It gives viewers an immediate sense of real people and things in the past before or after they watch the movies.

So far, the Glimpses documentaries have been truly eclectic. They have ranged from a 50s report on litter that delved into rising concerns about rubbish in Wembley Stadium, parks and

gardens; an information film about the most popular dog breeds in 1947, and a report on a typical day for passengers, staff and pilots in an airport in the 60s.

Viewers have written in to share their excitement about seeing older relatives and friends in these documentaries.

As you'd expect, the main audience is over 60, but there's a growing number of younger viewers keen to discover their parents' or grandparents' history. For many older fans, it's easier to relate to the channel's classic films than a lot of current shows. Some have even sent in emails revealing that they started watching TV regularly again because of Talking Pictures TV. After all, it's a reminder of their past and a chance to reminisce.

The channel has really helped residents in care homes open up to each other and share their memories too. It's also been rumoured that the Queen is a fan and enjoyed some Laurel and Hardy films that were broadcast whilst she was ill one Christmas. If that's true, she's not alone. Famous faces that have supported the channel include Matt Lucas, Barbara Windsor and Vic Reeves. Reeves even became part of Talking Pictures' theme days. He introduced some of his favourite vintage films and provided his insights.

Other theme days have spotlighted a certain actor or film genre. When possible, the channel gets the actor, their family or their cast mates to discuss the actor's filmography.

Featured, for instance, has been Sam Kydd, who you might remember as Mike Baldwin's father in Coronation Street during the 80s. In his heyday, between 1946 and 1953, he appeared in more British films than any other actor. It was a real insight into Kydd's work to hear his son read from his father's diaries and offer his thoughts about his films.

Arguably the channel's biggest coup to date was to persuade Patricia Dainton, an actor who last appeared in films 55 years ago, to come back into the limelight and talk about her films, such as Dancing With Crime with Richard Attenborough.

Cronin wants the channel to keep expanding both in terms of increasing the number of young viewers and the way it transmits its material. "Given that linear TV is on the down curb, we want to cement our core audience, encourage as many younger viewers as possible and, where relevant, add any new forms of transmission."

He doesn't want to lose any momentum and become complacent. The television landscape keeps changing, and as much as the Cronin's are showcasing the past, they're also looking to the future.

Battling on: what Russia's unrelenting appetite for second world war films means

By Alex Cox, The Guardian

THE SECOND WORLD WAR ENDED – as we all know – 75 years ago. Many things have happened since then, yet the war retains an unending fascination for politicians and for makers of big-budget cinema. Since films aren't made by accident, there's a reason for the many, costly movies about events that happened long ago. War movies aren't historical documents, but signs of our current times.

Saving Private Ryan (1998) persuaded us that Americans fight wars justly, and with a moral conscience. The mega-budget Pearl Harbour (2001) suited the aspirations of the Project for the New American Century. Dunkirk (2017) celebrated Britain going it alone, gamely and successfully improvising her European exit.

In Russia, however, things are very different. In 1985, the director Elim Klimov made that rare thing, a genuinely anti-war movie: Come and See. But such things are rare. What do the current generation of Russian war films have to tell us? I sat down to watch as many as I could. Most stand in the shadow of Klimov's film and detest war. But they did so with widely different budgets, and in different ways.

Fortress of War (2010)

The first film I saw was one of the grandest. With a massive cast, Alexander Kott depicts the defence of a fortress in Belarus, impeding the Nazi advance for nine days. As in the other films I saw, scenes of idyll are inevitably followed by a surprise attack with shells, mortars, Panzer tanks. A fifth column infiltrates the fort and spreads confusion. Heroism, tragedy and mass murder by bomb and flamethrower ensue.

There are many powerful moments. Surrendering troops encounter a Goebbels-esque Nazi officer calling: "Commissars, Jews, communists – this way ..." Exhausted and outraged, Commissar Fomin (Pavel Derevyanko) declares himself to be all three. This is a rare bird, an epic, complex, intelligent war picture, with the production values and complexity of The Bridge on the River Kwai.

White Tiger (2012)

*Ghost-town showdown ... White Tiger.
Photograph: Mosfilm/Channel One
Russia/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock*

Directed by Karen Shakhnazarov, this is minimalist by comparison: the story of a tank driver who miraculously survives horrific burns and becomes ... the Tank Whisperer. Aleksey Vertkov plays the Whisperer, leading a small armoured company against a ghostly and invulnerable German mega-tank, the Tiger.



There are Boy's Own Paper tank battles, a tank showdown in a muddy ghost town, and the strangest ending. The war is won, but the Tank Whisperer will have none of it: still working on his tank, he insists the White Tiger will be back, 50 or 100 years from now. Here Shakhnazarov shifts to a Philip K Dickian alternate reality, in which Hitler, having survived the war, relaxes in a fire-lit mansion, planning his next move.

Stalingrad (2013)



Epic 3D extravaganza ... Stalingrad. Photograph: Allstar/Disney

At \$30m, this is the most expensive of these films, and it made a decent profit at home and abroad. As with American cinema, gigantisms does not equal good, and it's difficult to appreciate this 3D extravaganza on a small screen.

It would probably be difficult to enjoy it on the Imax screen, too, as the exaggerated demands of 3D (heroic infantry charging the

camera while they are on fire) give Stalingrad all the depth and gravitas of Pearl Harbour.

The Battle for Sevastopol (2015)

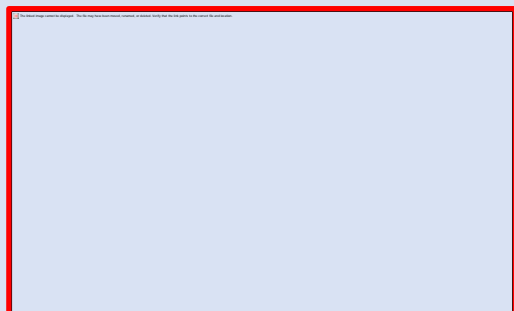


A sniper's moral dilemma ... The Battle for Sevastopol. Photograph: Itar-Tass News Agency/Alamy Stock Photo

Another film suffering from gigantisms, as well as a lack of faith in its subject: this is really the biopic of Soviet sniper Ludmilla Pavlichenko. Pavlichenko is played by Yuliya Peresild, a beautiful, enigmatic and not very interesting actor – although admittedly the script gives her little to work with. The real Pavlichenko had a son before she became a solider and was, you suspect,

less of a comic-book character. The film attempts to deal with the moral problem of sniperdom but is burdened by a fudgy flashback-within-a-flashback structure, and some truly terrible acting (Russians playing Americans) when Pavlichenko goes on a PR tour of the US. It would be good to see a linear recut of the film, dropping the pop songs that accompany the battles and ditching most of the American scenes.

Road to Berlin (2015)



A modest, sometimes charming story ... Road to Berlin. Photograph: IMDb

In a small corner of the war, a 20-year-old lieutenant from the Caucasus is sentenced to death for cowardice: he failed to deliver dispatches when caught in the inevitable Panzer onslaught. His guard, a 22-year-old Kazakh, saves him from the Nazis but remains determined to turn him in to the proper authorities. A modest story with good characters and some charm.

Panfilov's 28 Men (2016)



*Thrilling battle scenes ... Panfilov's 28 Men.
Photograph: IMDB*

This ditches characters and charm in favour of multiple references to *Seven Samurai*, and non-stop tank action.

The result is, well, thrilling tank battles and some magnificent widescreen camerawork, including the best "moonlit" cinematography I've seen.

Indestructible AKA Tankers (2018)



*Tanks, lots of tanks ... Indestructible.
Photograph: IMDb*

Also, about tank battles, but I can remember little of it, other than that there were lots of tanks. To sum up: the bigger-budget Russian films tend to adopt the contemporary action strategies of western films, with washed-out, high-contrast flashbacks, speeded-up action, moments of slow motion, extremes of sound design. What are we being told? That Russians are survivors. Tough but human. Multi-ethnic:

the Irishman, the Italian and the Jew in a Hollywood GI foxhole become the Caucasian, the Kazakh and the Jew in a MosFilm trench. And there are always women and children present – because the Russians are fighting on Russian soil.

Above all, the message is one of ever-present danger. Alliances with militarily powerful states exist only until they are broken. Then the shells and aircraft and Panzers come. There are no sympathetic Germans here: in *Fortress*, the sound of a German voice inevitably presages horror. But the message is not simply Germans = bad.

The enemy are usually identified as Nazis; Nazis must be exterminated. Hitler remarks at the end of *White Tiger* that the long-term western project, which he was only trying to carry out, was to destroy the Russians.

I don't know that this is so. I think the fact that I can write this, and watch these movies, shows that anti-Russian sentiment is not universal, that an anti-Russian project has not, as yet, taken total hold of our national narrative. One of the best ways to get to know a country – a place you may never visit, especially in plague years – is by studying its films. The characters may speak another language, but cinema lingo is universal, and there is a lot to be learned.