

Stories which have emerged in the media over the weekend relating how General Sir Nick Carter the Chief of the General Staff is culling 'middle management' in the British Army underscores the challenges that the service faces in the post Afghanistan era. Yesterday service personnel from the last Herrick deployment to Afghanistan received a 'welcome home' from parliamentarians in Westminster to thank them for their service; and well done too, says Nick Watts.

The challenges facing the British Army is the topic for the latest policy paper released by the UK Defence Forum [\[Grey Paper 176\]](http://www.ukdf.org.uk/Grey_paper_-_GR176.html). The challenges faced in the post-Afghanistan era are many: a Strategic Defence and Security Review due this year, and continuing austerity which threatens defence spending. As General Carter's move signals, the greatest threat is change. The Army cannot 'swan on' regardless of how the wider world is changing, and it will need intellectual agility to adapt to this new era.

The army has never been great at change; the cultural resistance tends to come from tribal loyalties which Carter's move seeks to quash. If the army is to be adaptable in the face of the requirement to prepare for contingent operations, it will need well motivated people who have a good understanding of what they are doing. Modern service chiefs also need to be able to argue their corner with the Treasury, as they will be the budget holders for their services. General Carter's move will create some small wiggle room when it comes to apportioning funds.

A smaller army plainly needs fewer middle management one and two star planners. But those who remain will have a full agenda. Re-basing forces from Germany to the UK will keep them busy until about 2019, although 70% should have returned by the end of 2015. Recruitment and retention will be a challenge in an army which has been making people redundant. The army will need 8,500 officers and soldiers to complete their training by 2017/18 to maintain a steady state. Recruiting people to the Reserve will also need managing, as it has run into trouble.

A significant challenge will be to maintain its relevance. This may seem like a paradox in an increasingly unstable world, but an army of 82,000 regulars, the planned strength on completion of the Army 2020 restructuring, has got to be able to generate sufficient forces to be credible. The army will need the right equipment to be capable.