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This pamphlet was first published in 2007, and Defence Viewpoints carried a two paragraph executive summary and link at the time (see 18 December 2007). With hindsight we've taken a fuller look at it.

It is the result of a 12-month study and sets out an approach to national security drawing on reforms and innovations from governments elsewhere in Europe and the US. It suggests some new ideas designed to shape the future of the national security architecture.

The text provides the reader with a comprehensive critique and a largely damning analysis of the government's inability to respond to the complexity of the current security environment. It offers evidence that the government's stance is variously to deny, ignore or muddle through and where the political manoeuvring around a situation assumes greater importance than the reality. Government departments are concerned with their own organisation and culture with no concern as to how they need to be coherent with the rest of the government machine.

Indeed, more time and effort seems to be devoted to internal bureaucratic issues than to the policy and pursuit of terrorists. Policies are pursued in isolation through lack of an adequate working level structure and mandates frequently overlap thereby confusing where true responsibility lies. Departmental reviews identify shortcomings but little or nothing is done to resolve these issues by putting in place a single mechanism for agreeing roles and responsibilities throughout Whitehall.

These criticisms include the Cabinet Office that should be at the centre of national security but its organisation does not lend itself to carrying out this role. The Prime Minister makes speeches acknowledging the interdependence of international and national security issues and that responsibility for them is a matter for all departments. Meanwhile, Whitehall organisation maintains a divide between international and domestic departments at the working level. To add to the general organisational chaos, even the Prime Minister seems to get confused over what he actually means when making policy statements.

It is abundantly clear that the Whitehall organisation based on functions and services is not suited to the present and future security environment that urgently needs a more integrated and strategic approach. Edwards argues that short-term adaptation will not satisfy this need, as at best it will only achieve marginal improvement. Long-term success must be based on a more inclusive, open and holistic approach to national security.

He further argues the need for ministers and civil servants to adapt in terms of process and structures and, most importantly, mindset. That argument is sound but he fails to probe to any depth the reasoning for his assertion that the state must develop close relationships with its

strategic partners, the private sector and the wider public raising the issues of greater transparency, information sharing and trust. Superficially, that seems logical but in order for this complex architecture to work in a crisis it will require a leader of Churchillian stature for whom there is great personal respect for his intellect and judgement by everyone involved at all levels. At the centre of this architecture is the democratic requirement for accountability. But with the scale of strategic partnerships proposed it would be difficult to assign meaningful and ultimate responsibility. Edwards does raise the issue but does not provide any realistic notion as to how it might be achieved.

Edward's interpretation of public value in the context of national security is well founded. He argues that the political landscape in the 21st century is radically different for debating national security because Western societies are inflicted with a sense of malaise and political institutions face a problem of legitimacy. Public value is based on the idea that the legitimacy of institutions formed by government mandate is not self-evident. They need to be proactive and flexible in identifying valued purposes, to provide opportunities for stakeholders to authorise those purposes and to provide representation of the value their work creates.

In the security context the underlying problem is the lack of a clearly articulated account of what national security is and its value to the individual and society. There is no framework for government, the public and politicians to deliberate over the decisions and the trade-offs that are required, and despite its rhetoric the government continues to work behind closed doors. Public value improves on earlier theories of public administration by indicating a wider range of ways that government can create value for the public. In this context the Labour government introduced a target-based culture to improve departmental efficiency. It has not been a great success and has conflicted with other initiatives because it focuses on efficiency gains and not on departments meeting their policy objectives. Edwards provides many examples of how it has failed and has become largely discredited. He argues forcibly that to achieve the change required the government must abandon its bunker mentality.

The three essential principles of adaptation that he puts forward are well justified but what he proposes would require a complete change in the way government is organised and not just in terms of national security. Its adoption would force departments to adopt new structures and cultures, to change from mechanistic thinking to systemic thinking and develop new mindsets. Unfortunately, Edwards glosses over how Ministers and departments might be convinced to give up their fiefdoms and surrender some authority to a more powerful Cabinet Office with executive responsibility. Overlooking that problem he proposes a new national security secretariat based in the Cabinet Office under the direction of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet with a range of responsibilities that would force departments and strategic partners to collaborate.

Closely allied to his proposals he proceeds to debunk the mantra of "need to know" and argues with considerably justification that essential collaboration can only be achieved through a "need to share" approach. He goes further and criticises the government's communications policy saying that to just communicate information to strategic partners is not enough and that the government must learn to engage them.

The communications revolution carries the associated risk that the government will make bad decisions because it has too much information about the wrong things. He quite rightly points out that knowledge management does not exist within government. However, it must not be forgotten that at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of awareness lies wisdom without which the lower levels of data, information and knowledge are of little value. This whole problem is compounded by the culture of government secrecy that undermines well-informed judgement by limiting the opportunity for access and that can be manipulated to avoid scrutiny. Unnecessary secrecy in government leads to defective decision-making whilst excessive secrecy erodes public confidence in government.

A government's first duty is to protect the people. With that in mind, Edwards's pamphlet is persuasive in that it puts forward sound ideas for changes to the national security concept that are demanded by the political landscape of the 21st century. By any measure, the scale of the changes proposed is enormous and the ramifications for Whitehall are vast. Nevertheless, it is clear from the evidence he offers that change is essential and cannot wait. The government will be failing the people if it continues with its existing policy of muddling through from crisis to crisis.

However, there are two aspects that Edwards has circumvented in his analysis and observations. It was Macmillan who remarked that governments are driven by "events". In a crisis it is imperative that governments can operate with a decision cycle that is of sufficient tempo that they are proactive and not reactive to events. To be reactive is to be overtaken by events and ultimately fail the people. Edwards proposals for a new national security concept and architecture that involves strategic partners may serve the government well on a day-to-day planning basis where partners are engaged to provide expert knowledge and judgement, but in a crisis that vast architecture may well have a level of inertia that cannot cope with events.

Edwards does not indicate how that architecture could rapidly evolve in the face of a crisis. It would be disastrous for Ministers to revert to making decisions behind closed doors. On a similar vein, he does not acknowledge that "big government" adds immeasurably to the many shortcomings of which he accuses it. Big government by its nature has many internal interfaces that are inherent lines of weakness and each requires close management and coordination. By endorsing the introduction of both international and national strategic partners, private companies, local authorities and the public at large, he has expanded that problem many times over. These relatively minor comments aside, this pamphlet offers a very substantial and thought provoking starting point for the necessary debate.

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