

The UK's Whole Force Concept - which aims to reconfigure reserves and private-sector defence personnel more closely alongside military personnel - is not fit-for-purpose and lacks overall enterprise-level planning, argues a new RUSI Briefing Paper.

'Making the Whole Force Concept a Reality' by John Louth and Peter Quentin examines the progress and suitability of the Whole Force Concept to the transformation of British Defence.

The Whole Force Concept is a UK defence policy that aims to encompass all personnel required to deliver Defence outputs, including: non-operational roles, covering Regular and Reserve Service personnel, Civil Servants and other civilians, including contractors.

The paper suggests that this new policy 'has been driven by the search for financial efficiencies and the recognition that many essential defence skills now reside in the private sector rather than the armed forces.' The problems with the implementation of the Whole Force Concept go much beyond the widely noted failure to date to recruit an increased number of reservists.

Even though this change is meant to usher in very profound change to notions of the military instrument, the report argues that the 'Whole Force Concept has not been effectively managed and is often neglected and misunderstood'.

'This complex and multi-part enterprise requires some focussed enterprise-level planning and management. This seems to be missing from within government, leaving the notion of the Whole Force Concept to free-wheel. This is unacceptable if UK defence now rests on the successful implementation of this idea.'

'The case has hardly been made to the public, and how it is to be operationalised remains unclear. It is as if a new and exciting belief system has emerged without the enabling architecture of churches, priests and congregations; a great idea, but somehow lacking in physicality.'

The paper highlights the opportunities for partnering between the military and the private sector (and between companies offering goods and service to defence) presented in the Whole Force Concept. But not enough has been done to best rationalise the best mix of public sector and private sector personnel and services at a strategic level:

'It is important to develop the thinking around the Whole Force so that defence capabilities reside where they are best managed and developed across an ever-expanding defence public-private partnership - actively shaped and deliberately managed as a whole enterprise.'

The Paper calls for 'more overt thinking needs to be undertaken on the articulation of requirements, the provision of surge capabilities and the generation of replacements, both in theatre and right through the defence value-chain. Decision-making has to be open and subject to full Parliamentary scrutiny. So the challenge for Westminster, Whitehall and corporate boardrooms is to operationalise an idea that already forms part of the taxonomy of defence. The myriad security challenges the UK faces suggests it cannot shirk this responsibility.'

Access entire paper at: www.rusi.org/wholeforceconcept2014

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