Twitter Thread by Nicholas Drummond

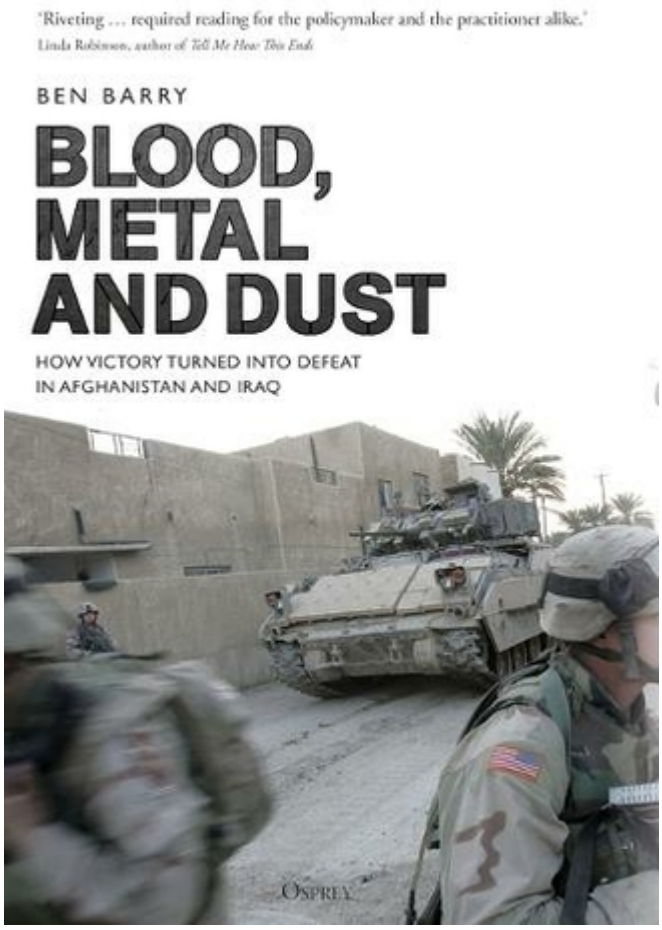
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BRITSH ARMY HEADCOUNT REDUCTION (Thread)
Looking back at personnel cuts made in 2010, a reduced Army of 82,000 didn't help Britain regain its financial strength, it simply signified a hollowing-out of our ability to defend ourselves.
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It destroyed the credibility of David Cameron's Coalition Government then and even more so in hindsight. It was military illiteracy on a grand scale. The problem wasn't so much the reduction itself, but the fact that there was no real strategy behind it, no future plan.
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Back in 2010, the UK's involvement Iraq and Afghanistan didn't really serve our national interests (See Ben Barry's book). If these conflicts were sub-optimal uses of the Army, they raised the important question of what the Army's underlying raison d'être should be.
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We hope the Integrated Review will provide a concrete response to this. In the meantime, the Integrated Operating Concept has been much talked about, but we have been left in the dark about what it signifies in terms of strategic priorities and a reconfigured force.



The resulting strategy will obviously be threat-driven with Russia, China, North Korea and Iran representing near-peer threats and Islamic terror groups in Africa and the Middle East posing an asymmetric threat. This suggests a mix of high-end and light forces.
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I don’t expect the UK to get embroiled in another Afghan-type adventure. But I can see short, sharp interventions similar to the UK's deployment to Sierra Leone in 2000, which was a bounded and highly successful operation.
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I do not expect us to go to war with Russia either, but we must be able to deploy pre-emptively to prevent a land grab in the Baltics. Kicking Russia out after it has seized territory, e.g. Ukraine, is likely to be difficult, costly and might risk nuclear escalation.
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Nor do I expect us to go toe-to-toe with China as this would also lead to a nuclear exchange. Even so, we need to stand-up to China so that it doesn't start taking liberties in Africa, Asia or closer to home. It respects strength and takes advantage of weakness.

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Instead, the Army needs to be configured for the kind of war we most expect. As @MichaelShurkin outstanding article about General Guy Hubin's doctrine, preparing to fight the wrong war proved to be extremely costly for France in 1940.
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https://t.co/OzVZ0ooGe5

The problem is we have an imperfect record for predicting future conflicts. So, yes, we must be prepared for the most likely scenarios, but also we need sufficient flexibility in our force to structure to respond to the nightmare scenario that jumps out of left field.
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In an ideal world, the Army might have three divisions: a heavy tracked armoured division, a medium wheeled mechanised division, and a light infantry division, including 16 Air Assault Brigade. With two of these being readily deployable, we could cover most scenarios.
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To achieve this structure, we would need an Army of 93,000-100,000 soldiers. Obviously, in the current financial climate, this is neither realistic nor affordable. So what is the minimum force we could and should be able afford to resource?
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Re-focusing the Army around a single heavy tracked armoured division would require it to be based close to where we might expect to use it. So, we would need a presence in Germany or Poland, similar to the one we had during the Cold War.
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COLD WAR 1945–1991



BRITISH ARMY OF THE RHINE

THE BAOR 1945–1993

PAUL CHRYSTAL

Since a high-intensity European conflict is an unlikely scenario, the enhanced forward presence of large scale UK forces in would tie-up units that couldn't easily be used elsewhere. So this is probably not the best use of limited resources.
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Consequently, we recognise that the Army needs to expeditionary by design. Within a European context, it would act as a rapid reinforcement force requiring it to be highly mobile with an emphasis on wheels rather than tracks. This is why Boxer and MRVP are important.
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Even so, retaining a limited number of MBTs would be prudent, in case our medium forces need to counter a heavy-weight adversary. This creates a need for Challenger and Ajax. But a tracked fleet would be reliant on additional tank transporters to deploy far.
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It seems likely the Army's war fighting division will be reconfigured around two Mechanised Infantry Brigades and an Armoured Infantry Brigade. It will additionally have 16 Air Assault Brigade, and sufficient Light Role Infantry Battalions to form two further brigades.
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However, what will most recapitalise the Army's war fighting ability is investment in artillery systems. Plans are underway to acquire new 155 mm howitzers, G/MLRS rocket and missile artillery, ISTAR, and air defence assets giving us significant indirect firepower.
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The question is how do you pay for all this when the economy has been tanked by a pandemic? With great difficulty. Consequently, any decision to cut headcount is not be about making soldiers redundant, but a gradual receding total numbers as soldiers exit the service.
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As a short-term measure to reduce overhead costs, reducing headcount makes sense. But long-term, we must commit to rebuilding an Army of 90K to 100K. Why? Ultimately, the Army is about boots on the ground. This is not a Luddite view, it reflects the nature of conflict.
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Yes, artillery is important. Yes, Cyber, C4I and ISTAR capabilities matter too. But should we ever find ourselves need to secure large urban areas, a very likely requirement in any major future conflict, being able to deploy infantry mass will be vital.
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We forget at our peril that warfare remains a human endeavour. Robots fighting robots is a game, not an act of war. When all the missiles are spent and our tanks lie in smoking ruins, we will still need soldiers with rifles and bayonets to seize and hold ground.
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Imagine a pandemic with a death rate of 10% .The impact would be catastrophic. Normal life would cease. Food supplies could be affected. Law and order could break down. Shortages could lead to public disorder. We would need to deploy the Army in UK towns and cities.
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Right now, we have only a limited capacity to deploy significant mass of soldiers on to UK streets. Even if we don't face another pandemic for a 100 years, the possibility of needing to deploy a large number of troops domestically or abroad means we must be prepared.
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Any Army of 100K could easily grow to 500K within a 12-24 month period. But an Army of 50K would take longer to increase. Moreover, today, wars unfold with unexpected speed and aggression. We will go to war with the army we have not the one we would ideally like.
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