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ARES & ATHENA 20

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The purpose of the British Army is to protect the United Kingdom by being ready to fight and win wars on land

Picture: Cpl Stephen Harvey, UK MOD © Crown copyright

20 A SENSE OF PURPOSE

CHACR

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> Politics and political leadership will change, public perceptions will ebb and flow, Army leadership will change, world events will evolve and erupt, but our purpose will remain the solid foundation upon which we will need to build

INTRODUCTION

General Sir Patrick Sanders
Chief of the General Staff

The purpose of our Army does not change. The demands on our Army, on the other hand, from its long-term design to the short-term contexts, circumstances and national needs will inevitably alter the emphasis that we will be required to place on making ourselves fit for that purpose. Politics and political leadership will change, public perceptions will ebb and flow, Army leadership will change, world events will evolve and erupt, but our purpose will remain the solid foundation upon which we will need to build; and we will continue to need to build in a measured way for our best guess of the demands of the future, and much more flexibly and rapidly for the unexpected events that will inevitably challenge us. We can only be consistently fit for purpose if we have enduring clarity of what that purpose is. This edition of *Ares & Athena* provides very useful food for thought in that foundational respect.

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS *ARES & ATHENA*

This edition of *Ares & Athena* has been drawn up to help to give precision to the Army's self-understanding; and thereby to strengthen its ability not only to function in a more aligned manner, but also to strengthen both its internal and its external messaging.

We have attempted to do this by exploring the generic importance of having clarity of purpose, and then providing an **enduring**, **simple** and **clear** explanation of the purpose of the British Army. This publication will therefore first explore why this discussion about purpose is necessary at all, then explore why a sense of purpose matters for an organisation (any organisation) as complicated as an army, and then (and only then) will lay out some of those ways in which the Army may seek to go about its business to fulfil that purpose on behalf of the nation that it serves.

There is an old Japanese proverb that goes along the lines of: *'Vision without action is a daydream; but action without vision is a nightmare!'* For that reason, it is always important to set out a clear vision before following it up with action. But even before the vision is laid out, it is equally important to be clear on 'purpose'. As Professor Jonathan Trevor (who writes in the next part of this publication) observes when he speaks annually to the Army Generalship Programme: an organisation that confuses vision (which inevitably changes every time the CEO [or CGS] changes) and purpose (which is enduring) will be condemned to a state of existential uncertainty.

Before we start, however, it is equally important to make clear, simplistic though it may sound, that there is a difference between 'purpose' and 'utility'. It is important to explain this because our exploration of this problem (which has endured over some seven years leading up to the publication of this *Ares & Athena*) has shown that the two words are often used as if they were synonymous. They are not. A failure to separate the two notions out has inevitably led to a tendency to muddy the clear waters of ***why*** we have an army with a detailed exploration of ***what we do*** with that army. This is unhelpful.

In the simplest of terms: Purpose means: *the reason for which something is done or created or which something exists.* Utility means: *the state of being useful, or the quality of being useful, or of having usefulness.*

In other words, purpose is about why something's existence is necessary, utility is about the usefulness of the thing that has been created *relative to its purpose*. The first is about why you create something, the second is about how well you have designed and made the thing that you have created. Or, in other words, and in this specific case, the discussion about the Army's purpose should first address, in the simplest of terms, what we have an army for; thereafter, and separately, one can explore, in rather more detail, how useful is the Army that one has created.

In short there are two distinct questions that need to be addressed: what is the purpose of our Army; and then, is our Army fit for purpose?

The first, surely, is likely to be fairly constant. The second must change as Army leadership, composition, design, doctrine, capability, context and all of the other inconstancies, change. In Clausewitzean terms, the purpose of the Army concerns its unchanging nature, the utility concerns its constantly changing character.

This *Ares & Athena*, therefore, seeks only to address that first question – what we have an army for – and explicitly not the second question – whether the Army is fit for purpose. In other words, it answers, in an enduring way, why we need an Army. It is for others, as circumstances ebb and flow, to judge whether the Army of the moment is fit for that enduring purpose within the specific context of the time.

We will do this first by making it clear why this debate, this distinction and this clarity of thought is important, specific to the British Army. We will then show that such clarity of thought, and articulation of purpose, is not only vital for an army (or, indeed, for a navy or an air force), but also for any enterprise. If one wishes to be able to understand utility one must first have a head-mark against which one can align all activity and against which one can judge and measure effect and effectiveness. Only then does it make sense to offer some thoughts upon how the British Army may seek to serve that purpose.

Why is this discussion necessary?

This discussion is necessary because armies, because they tend to be complex and complicated things, have a habit of inflicting self-harm by conducting internal debates about purpose, vision, roles and utility that cause confusion of core purpose and thus confusion of delivery and alignment within those armies (and the British Army is certainly no exception, indeed, is perhaps an extreme example of the tendency). This confusion is inevitably exacerbated in the British Army by a number of factors, ranging from the wide array of tasks and activities expected of it to the very particular character of its 'tribal' nature. This circumstance is then reflected in its external communication, constantly questioning its view of its purpose and seeking to explain itself in all of its nuance and complexity, through a muddled combination of purpose, vision and utility and an exploration of all of the ways in which the Army may beneficially serve the nation. In short, the Army is not in the habit of signing up to a single, simple corporate view. This is unhelpful in three respects:

Internal. The Army delivers a complex mixture of outputs, from the hard end of fighting all-out existential war, to the softer tangible tasks and intangible outcomes such as providing support to local communities or even simply returning 'better' citizens to wider society post-service. The complexity of that demand means that the Army has consistently been reluctant to pin itself down to a single simple head-mark or statement of purpose. Consequently, the Army has a habit of debating amongst itself as to what its core purpose may be (often coloured by the interests of or demands upon those individuals, units, Regiments or formations in the debate). A once-and-for-all simple statement of purpose, easy to understand and hard to challenge, provides those in the Army (regular, reservist, civil servant and contractor) with cohesion. This serves the moral component of fighting power. This allows the Army to align its business model. This allows the Army to set its

priorities (of delivery and of procurement). This provides the internal head-mark, from Army plan to small team or section execution.

External. To remain viable and effective the Army must inevitably compete for resource: with the Treasury's wider demands; within the MoD's internal debate; and with the resource demands of the other Services. Defence must compete for resource against the wider demands of society: healthcare, welfare, education and so on; and must also compete with the inconstancies of the economy and national strategic and political imperatives and priorities. The Army needs to appeal to and recruit from the society that it serves. The Army's moral cohesion is supported by public empathy (rather than just the sympathy of a distanced polity). In all of these things, the Army's position is inevitably weakened if its self-explanation is either unnecessarily complex and hard to grasp, or is varied and contradictory. Those holding the purse strings will react better to a clear, simple and consistent articulation of purpose, than to a muddied message. Those others seeking to state their own case in the tight battle for resource allocation will inevitably reinforce their own message by playing to an inconsistent or over-complex message from the Army. An ever-less-familiar public, often with an impatient appetite for simple clarity and an increasingly short attention span, will only be made less, rather than more, informed by complex or varied explanations.

Alignment. The efficiency of the Army can only be enhanced if there is a clear, enduring and simple head-mark to which it can navigate. No journey can be executed efficiently if one does not know where one is ultimately heading and why. No journey can be executed efficiently if the destination is regularly changed or adjusted. No journey can be executed efficiently if those on the journey are constantly in debate about the destination. For any delivery system to be effective there needs to be clarity and consistency of raison d'être. From that flows alignment, strength, identity, cohesion and multiple other benefits, tangible and intangible.

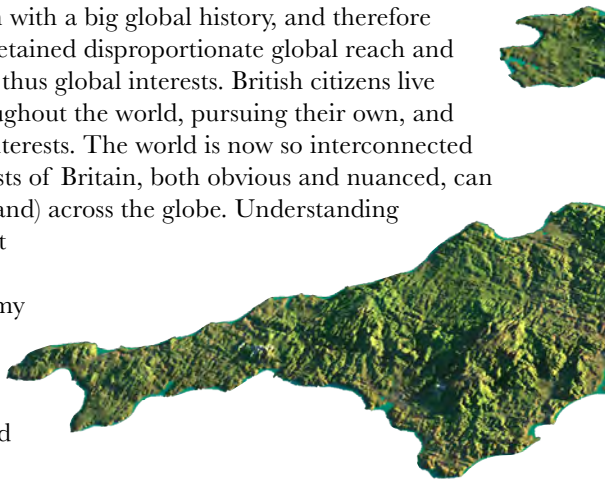
Safeguarding people and their interests

Adam Smith, in his great work *The Wealth of Nations*, famously stated that the first duty of the sovereign, or the government, is to protect the citizens for which they are responsible from violence, harm or invasion. In other words, regardless of all of the other pressures upon a government, first and foremost, for any society to be able to function effectively its citizens need to be kept safe.

Debatably the three legs of the stool upon which human contentment sits are: security, stability and prosperity. It can be argued that this generalisation applies across the board, from individuals to states. At the most basic level, if an individual does not have to fear for their safety, nor the safety of those for whom they care (i.e. they have security), they can be content; if they have all that they need in terms of food, shelter and possessions (prosperity) they can be content; and if life is sufficiently predictable that this happy state will continue for the foreseeable future (stability) they can be content. A threat to any of the three is a threat to them all, but the most important of the three is security.

For example: a family can be happy but poor; they can be happy but unclear as to what may happen tomorrow; but even if they are well off and comfortable, and the future looks constant and predictable, they cannot be happy if they are threatened, their house is broken into and their children attacked. The provision of security is a pre-requisite to stability and prosperity, whereas the provision of prosperity and stability are merely contributors to security. If this broad generalisation is accepted as a fair summary of the recipe for human contentment, then it follows that Adam Smith was correct in suggesting that the first duty of any nation is to provide security for its people.

While Britain is certainly a small island nation based upon trade, whose security and prosperity, throughout history, has depended upon a strong navy to keep threats away from the island and to allow trade to be conducted, it is equally true that it is also, self-evidently, a nation of people. People live on land, conduct enterprise on land and govern on land. The economy of the nation depends as much upon the activities conducted on land, by the inhabitants of the small island, as they do on the trade routes in and out of that island. The people with whom the nation interacts, and who have influence upon the security, stability and prosperity of the nation, live on lands abroad. So, for the government to fulfil its so-called first duty to its citizens it will need to provide the nation with an effective army (and, for an island nation, also an effective navy). Furthermore, the study of modern war, especially of Britain's involvement in war and military operations of all kinds over the last century or more, will quickly show that no modern military force is wise to seek to fight without the benefit of powerful support or cover from the air.



Small island nation though it may be, the United Kingdom is also a nation with a big global history, and therefore arguably has retained disproportionate global reach and influence, and thus global interests. British citizens live (on land) throughout the world, pursuing their own, and the nation's, interests. The world is now so interconnected that the interests of Britain, both obvious and nuanced, can be found (on land) across the globe. Understanding this means that the United Kingdom's army must be prepared to safeguard the citizens and the interests of the nation globally, as well as on the national territory. This, in turn, means that our island nation's globally engaged army will need an effective navy or air force to deliver it to its points of need. These points are therefore made not to offer a measure of relative importance for the Army within Defence (i.e. to set it against the needs of the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force). No sensible British Defence analyst would argue that the nation's defences would be better served without an effective army, navy and air force.

With all of that in mind, this *Ares & Athena* seeks to offer an enduring view of what the Army is for. Before it does that, however, it is essential to pin down, with real clarity, why that enduring sense of purpose matters – in any organisation.

Small island nation though it may be, the United Kingdom is also a nation with a big global history, and therefore arguably has retained disproportionate global reach and influence, and thus global interests. British citizens live (on land) throughout the world, pursuing their own, and the nation's, interests.

WHY PURPOSE MATTERS

Dr Jonathan Trevor
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This section explores the importance of purpose within organisations and how to think about it from a leadership perspective. Whilst its purpose has always been the loadstone upon which every organisation is built, it has only recently become a mainstream management topic in its own right. It is often referred to today in terms of corporate social responsibility or environmental, social and governance (ESG) priorities – a counterpoint to the well-established profit motive that has dominated industry traditionally. The focus of this commentary is less on the role of the company or corporation in society, and more on how to define an organisation's purpose, how to create alignment behind it in the context of a changing organisational environment, and why purpose matters for work organisation performance.

The Work Organisation

A work organisation is any social group that seeks to convert economic inputs, such as human, technological, physical and intellectual capital, into value-added outputs, in the form of products, services or activities. This broad definition runs the gamut from commercial organisations (e.g., companies), public sector organisations (e.g., government departments) and not-for-profit organisations (e.g., charities) and, increasingly, hybrids of all three motives. It also covers small or large organisations, domestic or multi-national, single domain or highly diversified, including an army.

The success of organisations is central to economic and social well-being at all levels of society, from the individual up to entire nation-states and the global economy overall. It is especially imperative when an organisation, such as an army or civil service, operates as a monopoly. If a monopoly organisation performs its purpose poorly, the consequences are potentially grave – much more so than the consequences of the failure of a single consumer goods manufacturer to produce, say, soup or soap. Put simply, it matters if armies fail. It is a critical responsibility of any leadership team, but especially in nationally important institutions, to ensure their organisation is fit for purpose – capable of performing its valuable purpose in the most effective possible way in the context of the changing operating environment over the short, medium and long-term.

Its purpose is central to the effective governance of any organisation because all organisations can be thought of as 'individuals and groups of people acting together to fulfil a common purpose'. This simple (but not to say easy) definition establishes four critical conditions for evaluating organisational effectiveness.[1]

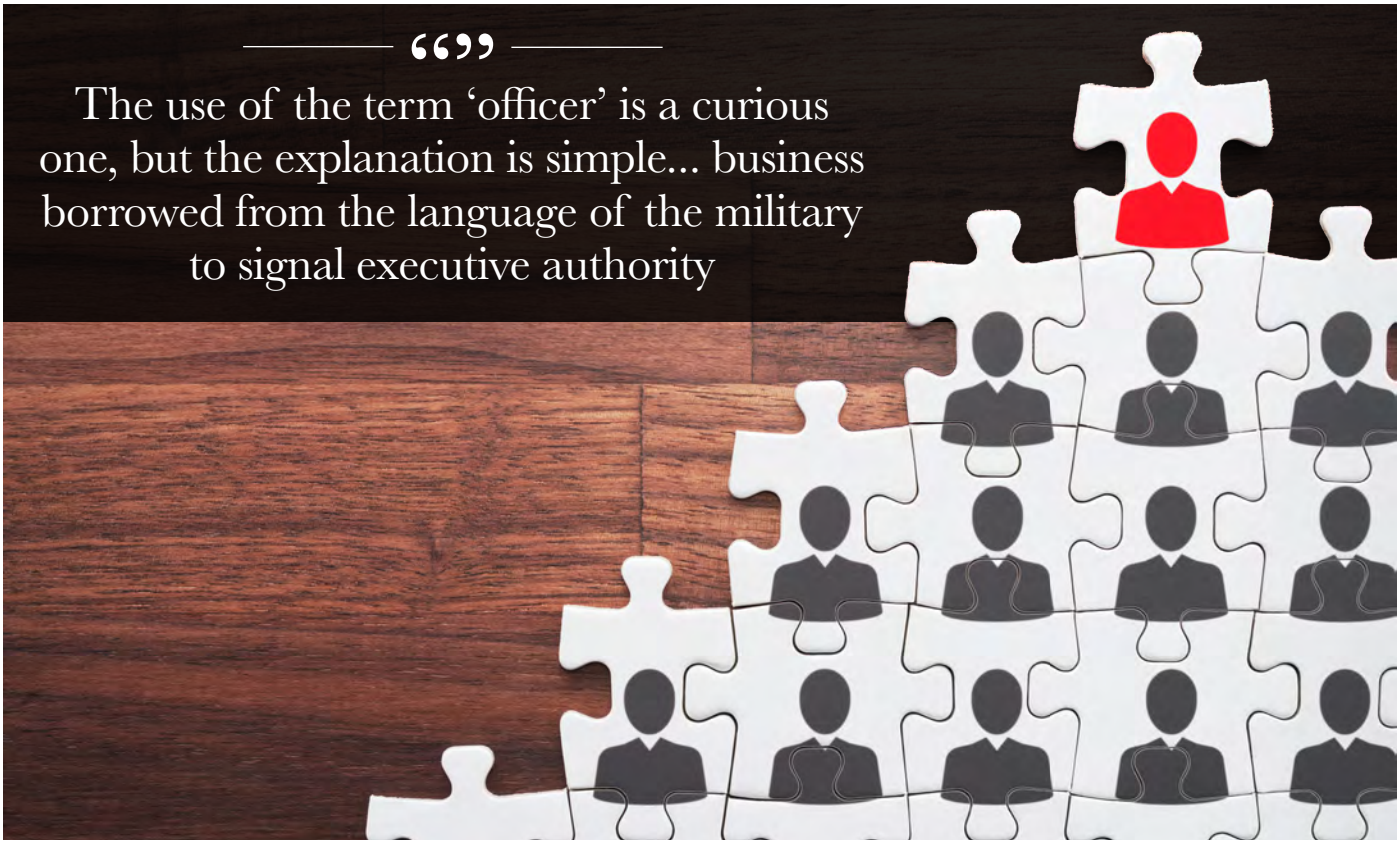
- ***Purpose:*** first, all organisations must have a purpose that is well understood and motivating. An organisation's purpose is its raison d'etre – the reason for its existence, the reason why it is maintained throughout thick and thin and why anyone outside of the organisation itself should care about it. Purely self-regarding organisations and institutions tend to have a short shelf-life.

- ***People:*** second, organisations require the mobilisation of people capable of performing the purpose as directed. Historically, we have referred to such people as employees, but increasingly its means gig workers, contractors, partners or not even people at all, but bots and artificial intelligence.

[1] *Trevor, J. (2022). Re:Align: A Leadership Blueprint for Overcoming Disruption and Improving Performance. Bloomsbury Publishing.*

> "Performance is contingent upon how well organised individuals and groups of people are to ensure cooperation to create value greater than any one individual's best efforts

Picture: Cpl Rob Kane, UK MOD © Crown copyright



● ***Structure:*** third, performance is contingent upon how well organised individuals and groups of people (or technologies) are to ensure cooperation to create value greater than any one individual's best efforts. Cooperation can be extended to include simple coordination (relatively low engagement) through to collaboration (deep engagement) and all other forms of work-based interaction between individuals, teams or departments.

● ***Alignment:*** fourth, the more an organisation's people, and its partners (including allies), are aligned to its purpose, the more likely they are to work hard, behave in strategically desirable ways and demonstrate commitment and loyalty.

This final point is critical. The most significant cause of poor organisational performance or value-destroying behaviour is misalignment. Misalignment can take multiple forms and occur for numerous reasons. First, and most simply, it occurs when there are competing interests between different groups within an organisation (for example, between employer representatives and employee representatives in pay negotiations; or, perhaps, in an army between those with a 'warfighting' role and those with a 'support and influence' role). It can also arise not because of active conflict, but because there is little buy-in – or low engagement, to use management speak – to an organisation's purpose and direction simply.

Most often, it occurs because there is a lack of clarity about what the purpose is, why it matters, and how an organisation should go about its business ideally, whether that is the business of creating wealth or defending the nation. Either way, being subordinate to a valuable enterprise purpose, as an *end*, confers meaning and importance upon an organisation's people as an effective *means* to those ends.

Its purpose should be the beginning and end of every conversation in an organisation, especially at senior levels with responsibility for articulating the purpose and setting strategic direction. An organisation's purpose is its North Star and aligning all of the organisation's moving parts behind it is challenging at the best of times. But it is made considerably more difficult in complex and dynamic environments, which place requirements on an organisation to be more integrated and more agile. There are two principal models that help us to understand the challenge facing leaders – the *modern* work organisation and the more recent and not very imaginatively entitled *post-modern* work organisation.

The *Modern* Work Organisation

The notion of the *modern* work organisation is a relatively recent phenomenon. The industrial revolution was made possible not only by advances in technology, such as the double-action steam engine, but also by accompanying and far-reaching managerial innovations. The most important of these was the advent of the 'bureaucracy' as a distinct and novel form of organising work. Writing at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the noted German sociologist, Maximilian Weber, described the essential principles of the 'ideal-type' work organisation – the bureaucracy. In theory, bureaucracies could operate at scale efficiently (i.e., grow large and grow fast) because of their rationally planned strategies, hierarchies of control, task specialisation, impersonal treatment of staff and customers, elaborate routines, formal rules and close supervision of performance.

Like the products they produced, bureaucratic work organisations were thought of as machines, to be designed, engineered and maintained by administrative experts. Employees, regardless of role, were factors of production merely. At the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy sat the *Chief Executive Officer* – the most senior manager, typically. The use

of the term 'officer' is a curious one, but the explanation is simple. At the time of the emergence of the bureaucracy as the dominant form of organising work in the Industrial Age in Western Europe, the only existing large organisations were the Church and the Military. Thus, business borrowed from the language of the military to signal executive authority. Indeed, the bureaucracy emphasised two classes of employees – managers and workers, thought of as the thinkers and doers, respectively (or the conceptual component and the physical component, if you prefer).

The responsibility of the thinkers (who were themselves separated into ranks of senior, middle and junior management) was to set strategic direction and, at lower levels, supervise implementation. The responsibility of workers was to implement the chosen strategy, issued from on high as a set of non-negotiable orders, directives and targets. To paraphrase the famous saying, '*Theirs (the workers) is not to question why, but to do and…. perform*'. This notion of blind subservience to hierarchal authority is also thought to have been borrowed from the stereotypical image of the military of old. Workers did not need to know the reasoning or purpose behind the directives they were expected to implement. They simply had to obey.

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Under another managerial innovation, scientific management, work had been broken down into component tasks, made to be highly measurable (in terms of inputs and outputs) and routinised, enabling mass prescription. Little discretion was required on the part of the worker – or considered desirable, even – for the vast majority of production-oriented roles. Variation arising from autonomy or discretionary behaviour was the enemy of mass consistency, standardisation and efficiency. Whilst it may sound disagreeable in the context of today's workplace, there was a logic at work.

First, senior decision-makers operating atop the hierarchy, like generals on the field of battle, were supposed to stand apart from operational concerns to command the most expansive view of the environment. The more comprehensive and complete the information at their disposal, the better able they were to choose rationally the most preferential course of action available to them. The hierarchical separation between thinkers and doers was intended to provide direction for the whole organisation from those best placed to make decisions. The chain of command was designed to connect ideas and action with little lost in transmission. Critically, non-compliance with senior decision-making created the opportunity for unwanted variation, wasted effort, unintended consequences and the decoupling of strategy and implementation. It was not to be tolerated.

Second, this approach to leadership (or management, discuss) was only made possible by the relative simplicity of the times. The business environment (including markets) in which the bureaucracy emerged was a transformative time politically, economically and socially, but it was characterised by stability and predictability. Growth followed a linear trend, and the order of the day was to capture a slice of it by creating and maintaining organisations (both businesses and government departments) capable of exploiting opportunities to maximise economies of scale. Scale, stability and standardisation were watchwords of the day, and organisations were designed to be as simple as possible, on paper at least. Organisational charts – basically engineering schematics with boxes and wires to represent people and resources – symbolised the assumptions behind organising work. Like chess pieces, people and resources could be moved around the board in various strategic plays to win the competition for customers and market share.

Having borrowed so much from the military historically, business was indeed thought of as a zero-sum battlefield in which success was binary – win or lose. But fast forward to today, and what might be considered effective is radically different in principle to the bureaucracy described by Weber. In function and form, we require very different capabilities of our organisations to be considered effective in the twenty-first century. And organisational purpose is at the heart of all things in a way that it has never been before.

The *Post-Modern* Work Organisation

In the same way that the bureaucracy came to be considered the dominant logic of the Industrial Age, a newer post-modern form of organisation – the post-bureaucracy – is emerging as the dominant logic of the Information Age. From the late 1970s onwards, and gathering rapid momentum in only the last twenty years, the post-bureaucratic organisation (PBO), also known as the network organisation or ecosystem, is radically different in principle from its predecessor.[2] Whereas the bureaucracy was machine-like, the PBO is organic, highly adaptable and prizes innovation over efficiency. (And this language will be very familiar to anyone involved in the design of 'Army Futures' or force development.)

There are other critical differences worth noting:

- Whereas tasks are separated in the bureaucracy and the treatment of employees and customers is impersonal, PBOs emphasises a common task for all and are sensitive to individuals' needs and distinctive contributions. Decision-making is 'democratised' (for which read decentralised), typically – being delegated to those closest to the action and with the greatest potential to develop innovative solutions to novel problems, either individually or, more likely, collectively (i.e., by tapping into the collective wisdom of the crowd).[3]

- Whereas the bureaucracy is vertically integrated (think chains of command), PBOs are flat and horizontally integrated, emphasising spontaneous collaboration much more than hierarchically supervised coordination.

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[2] *Donnellon, A., & Heckscher, C. C. (1994). The post-bureaucratic organization: New perspectives on organizational change. Sage Publications.*

[3] *Burns, T., & Stalker, G. M. (2011). Mechanistic and organic systems of management. Sociology of Organizations: Structures and Relationships, 14.*

The Next Generation Air Dominance under development in the US envisages that in future a swarm of crewed and uncrewed aircraft, each possessing a different specialised capability, will act collectively at a moment's notice to complete the desired mission outcome

- Whereas the bureaucracy is structured as a hierarchy with close spans of control between levels and specialised verticals (think departments, divisions or lines of business – or corps, divisions, battalions and regiments), the PBO is a network made up of many different actors (or nodes) connected through relationships and social ties, which are either weak (such as for the purpose of simply sharing knowledge) or strong (such as for the purpose of completing a shared task).

- Whereas the bureaucracy has a defined boundary (you are either on the inside or the outside), the PBO has a 'fuzzy' boundary and relies on its network of external individuals and partnering organisations to source knowledge, accelerate innovation and integrate capability for superior advantage.

- Finally, whereas the bureaucracy seeks to create alignment through the enforcement of prescribed routines and formal rules, the PBO is highly informal, securing high alignment behind a common purpose through engagement and the sharing of social values manifest in desirable behaviours.

Critically, PBOs seek to leverage external resources much more than the internally focussed bureaucracy, and agility (not stability) and connectivity (not separation) are both critical to success.[4] Another essential difference is that PBOs are considerably more complex than the simply-by-design bureaucracy. PBOs are organic networks – or social communities with no discernible 'centre' in the extreme – flexing and morphing in response to changing demand in an increasingly dynamic, complex and disrupted global business environment. Post-bureaucratic principles apply not simply to the organisation of people, whether employees or contractors. Some of the best demonstrations of the application of post-bureaucratic principles are in the technology realm, such as cloud computing, and the fusion of technology and human capability to develop unprecedented capability.

Another example might include netcentric warfighting. Beyond better communications simply, networked warfighting can apply on a macro (i.e., the whole battlefield) and micro scale (i.e., individual systems). An example of the latter is the "Team of teams" term popularised to describe the organisation of US special forces during the War on Terror.[5] More recently, there has been considerable focus on developing and exploiting 'systems of systems' in air combat, such as the Team Tempest future fighter aircraft initiative in the UK or the Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) fighter in the US. The progression of warfighting aircraft illustrates the progression of thinking from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic principles.

Consider that in the mid-twentieth century, combat aircraft were highly specialised – designed to be capable of either ground attack, air superiority, interception or reconnaissance (to name but a few roles). Their distinctive individual forms reflected their specialised functions, being built to either withstand ground fire with a long loitering time, or to fly fast,

[4] *Trevor, J. (2019). Align: A Leadership Blueprint for Aligning Enterprise Purpose, Strategy and Organisation. Bloomsbury Publishing*

[5] *McChrystal, G. S., Collins, T., Silverman, D., & Fussell, C. (2015). Team of teams: New rules of engagement for a complex world. Penguin.*

or be supremely agile or fly higher than other aircraft and defensive missiles. Individual aircraft could primarily perform one function only, albeit very well.

By the late twentieth century, specialisation had given way to role versatility or 'multi-role' capability. The one aircraft – or platform – could be made to be capable of performing multiple roles within the one mission, switching rapidly from ground attack to air attack or reconnaissance, say, by incorporating new technologies, sensors and tactics. Again, form reflected function, and multi-role aircraft became vastly more complex, heavy, and expensive 'Swiss Army knives'. Even so, whilst the most versatile and sophisticated of aircraft typically, multi-role fighter aircraft cannot match the speed, agility, duration or altitude of specialised aircraft. There are advantages to disadvantages to both approaches – and a trade-off, in this case, between capability and flexibility.

To come to today, like so much of the Army's capability development, warfighting aircraft development is fully embracing the systems of systems approach to overcome this perceived trade-off. The NGAD under development currently in the US, for example, envisages that in the future a swarm of crewed and uncrewed (i.e., remotely piloted or autonomous air vehicles, or UAV) aircraft, each possessing a different specialised capability, will act collectively at a moment's notice to deploy its resources in response to new opportunities and threats to complete the desired mission outcome (not objective).

By connecting a diverse range of complementary capabilities in an agile way, the whole collective system – or swarm – is considerably more valuable in capability terms than the sum of its individual sub-systems or any one individual platform (aircraft) could ever be, no matter how sophisticated. A system of systems, like NGAD, is a shapeshifter, flexing and morphing its form in real-time to perform its function against the requirements of an increasingly complex, dynamic and intensely competitive environment. Or so the theory goes.

Regardless of the march of time and technology, the importance of starting and finishing with a clear articulation of purpose becomes ever more vital to the effective working of the enterprise

PBOs are complex adaptive systems, with advantages and disadvantages, just like the bureaucracy. And just like the bureaucracy, PBOs need to be designed and managed very carefully if they are to avoid becoming dysfunctional and poor performing. In fact, a significant risk for the PBO is disintegration in the absence of formal controls – the risk of the various moving parts (think people, teams and organisations), many located externally and potentially loosely coupled, acting separately from or even contrary to the common purpose. Thus, regardless of the march of time and technology, the importance of starting and finishing with a clear articulation of purpose becomes ever more vital to the effective working of the enterprise.

Practical Considerations

Evaluating an organisation's purpose presents an opportunity to consider the fundamentals – an opportunity that should be relished. Outlined below are some critical questions for leaders

to assess and address with their teams, their stakeholders and their customers.

1. What is our raison d'etre?
- **a.** Why do we exist?
- **b.** Who should care that we do?
  - **i.** Employees, investors, customers, regulators, policymakers?
  - **ii.** All of the above? Does one group matter more than the others?
- **c.** Do they care? If not, why not?

And, in more detail:

2. How well *understood* is our purpose?
- **a.** Is it understood equally well by all those that matter to us (internally and externally)?
- **b.** Do we need to articulate it differently for different audiences (internally and externally)?

3. Assuming they understand our purpose, how much is it *valued* by others outside of the organisation itself, e.g., customers if we are a business, or the government or the general public, say, if we are an army?
- **a.** If it is not valued, is it because we have articulated it poorly, or is it something more fundamental?

And finally:

4. How capable are we of performing our purpose well – as best as it can be?
- **a.** If we are not capable, why?
- **b.** What is preventing high performance? What might be missing?
- **c.** What should be your leadership priorities to close the gap?
- **d.** What is the ideal form of our organisation to fulfil its function?

> Because security, stability and prosperity are the cornerstones of wellbeing, governments need armies

Picture: SAC Connor Tierney, UK MOD © Crown copyright

FULFILLING THE PURPOSE

Because the first duty of a sovereign, or government, is to provide security to the people for whom it is responsible; and because security, stability and prosperity are the cornerstones of wellbeing (with security as the 'first among equals'); and because mankind is a land-dwelling creature, governments need armies. And thus their purpose is relatively clear and uncomplicated: *The purpose of any army is to protect the people and interests of the nation by fighting and winning the nation's armed conflicts on land.*

Whether an army is effective at that task, whether it has utility, depends upon how it is structured, equipped and used relative to that purpose. The purpose itself remains constant and simple, regardless of the complexity of the demands and requirements that may be placed upon an army in its attempt best to service that purpose. The following section seeks to outline some of those ever-changing ways in which the Army may seek to have utility relative to its constant purpose.

THE ARMY PURPOSE ILLUSTRATED BY DELIVERY AND STRATEGY

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This edition of *Ares and Athena* offers vibrant consideration of the need for institutional purpose and provides compelling logic for the purpose of the British Army. While this purpose has not been recently codified, an intrinsic understanding of it has driven the Army's evolution throughout its history and lies at the heart of *Future Soldier*.[6] Ensuring that the Army remains fit for its purpose is the key function of the Army Headquarters, so this thinking is of vital importance to us.

The Integrated Review[7] that led to *Future Soldier* reminds us of the importance of integration: with sister services, other agents of national power, allies and partners – we do not expect to operate or fight alone. But it is also important to remind ourselves of our unique contribution to the government's tool kit: '*The core purpose of land forces is the defeat of opposing land forces in armed conflict*'.[8] It is a role played uniquely by armies. If we are defeated in armed conflict we fail; this is why our Army has been designed to fight and win – to protect our land, people and interests.

In short, the British Army represents and defends the society from which it is drawn. Its purpose is to protect the United Kingdom by being ready to fight and win wars on land. At the same time, the requirement for a large army without an existential threat can seem a questionable investment of resources – no one wants to pay more for their insurance policy than they have to. Therefore, ensuring that the wider utility of the British Army, including roles in domestic resilience, conflict prevention and delivering prosperity to the nation, is recognised and exploited is fundamental to its existence, appreciation and development. While our purpose demonstrates how far we are prepared to go in order to protect our land, people and interests – and we are ready to do this – we must positively and energetically strive to prevent conflict and address threats alongside our allies and partners; and provide domestic resilience to the UK.

How what we do achieves the British Army's Purpose

We make ourselves fit for that purpose by our commitment to four mission sets which are aligned to it as follows:

First, protecting the UK homeland, our overseas territories and British citizens around the world. This is fulfilling the first duty of government as explored in the opening thoughts of this *Ares & Athena*. The British Army must be able to rapidly provide disciplined mass, complemented by necessary specialisations cohered under well-exercised and trusted command and control structures. In terms of our global footprint, the garrisoning of the UK's Permanent Joint Operating Bases and overseas territories remains a standing task and a powerful demonstration of the British Army's

[6] *The generational transformation programme to deliver a more agile, expeditionary and lethal Army, announced in November 2021.*

[7] *gov.uk/government/collections/the-integrated-review-2021*

[8] *Army Doctrine Publication Land Operations Part 2: The Application of Land Power - 2022*

> The priority placed on our commitment to the NATO alliance is profound and cemented in UK policy. The British Army's commitments forward in Europe, leadership of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps and wider capabilities held at readiness in the UK, signal a leading contribution to the alliance's deterrence and defence of the Euro-Atlantic area

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commitment and reach overseas. Our developing Land Regional Hubs alongside Defence's network of Global Hubs enable the appropriate projection of our interests around the world, while the Army's Global Response Force is held at very high readiness to react to any unforeseen events to reinforce or insert where we are not permanently established.

Second, deterring attacks on NATO territory and defending it as required. The priority placed on our commitment to the NATO alliance is profound and cemented in UK policy. The British Army's commitments forward in Europe, leadership of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps and wider capabilities held at readiness in the UK, signal a leading contribution to the alliance's deterrence and defence of the Euro-Atlantic area.

Third, constraining Hostile State Activity. For those adversaries who are incapable of or unprepared to overtly commit to hostilities, the presentation of multifaceted threats below the threshold of conflict will remain an attractive and efficient way to seek to further their interests. Whether at home or abroad, the British Army's ability to identify, deter and constrain such activity while being prepared to respond to it, remains in high demand by the UK government as well as allies and partners.

Fourth, bound up in all of the above, protecting and advancing the UK's broader interests abroad. Arguably this is the most nuanced of missions, requiring the British Army to work closely with partners across government to establish, maintain and capitalise on relationships that serve our foreign policy and prosperity agendas. Beyond threats identified and defeated around the world, it is these interests and the requirement to service and protect them that drive much of our activity.

How the British Army remains fit for purpose – the role of strategy

Events will continue to test the British Army and our people will always find a way to win; but our strategy plays a fundamental role in keeping the Army fit for purpose and setting it up for success. Given the ambition of the nation we represent, we should expect what we are asked to do (the ends) to test our ability to find the ways to deliver them with the resources (the means) at our disposal. This is the challenge of strategy formulation. An understanding of what our strategy seeks to achieve explains how we deliver a British Army that is fit for its purpose.

First, the British Army must be fit for purpose today; delivering the mission sets above through our global network and an effective fielded force delivered by the three front-line divisions of the Field Army and the Joint Helicopter Command. This force must be as ready and productive as possible. Maximising the potential of the whole force: Regulars, Reserves and Civil Servants, lies at the heart of this.

Second, as the world and challenges evolve, so must the British Army in order to maintain relevance and ensure that we can continue to fulfil our purpose. Constant and iterative modernisation of the force is necessary to ensure that the Army remains effective and competitive – both for warfighting and deterring those who may consider fighting a war against the UK as a credible option. The British Army must continuously modernise to be able to address evolving challenges and challengers: we cannot afford to stand still. Our Experimentation and Trials Group and Land Industrial Strategy have key roles to play in this regard.

Third, appreciating that incremental evolution through

modernisation will not necessarily anticipate or recognise significant changes to the Defence and Security requirements of tomorrow, the British Army must continuously horizon-scan, identify threats and opportunities and focus investment in the right areas to prepare an effective army for tomorrow's challenges. We need to transform ahead of the threats to be able to fight better and remain capable of defeating them than those who wish to challenge the UK and all that makes and matters to it.

Fourth, appreciating that modernisation and transformation are to a large extent driven by technology and its application, the British Army needs to ensure that our human capabilities are prepared to exploit the opportunities provided by technology to maximise our effectiveness. The balance is shifting, and as a Service that traditionally is perceived to equip the force rather than crew equipment, this focus can neither be understated nor under resourced; it demands institutional and individual commitment to ensure that we are able to serve the British Army's purpose most efficiently and effectively into the future.

Finally, we need to ensure the robustness and resilience of our Institutional Foundation which underwrites the delivery of the other elements of the Strategy. Short of war, the Army influences and protects our population, strengthens homeland resilience, deters opportunism and constrains adversaries. And ultimately the British Army is drawn from the society it is charged with protecting and relies upon its prosperity to afford both protection and warrant something worthy of protecting. We have always been, and will always be, bound inextricably to our people – both those in service and those whom we serve. While the unique purpose of the British Army is embodied by the mission sets it delivers, it is our strategy that ensures that we remain fit for purpose given the competing demands of today and the uncertain demands of tomorrow. The alignment of people, equipment and activity to fulfil the institution's purpose remains a central tenet of effective military strategy; and effective strategy serves that purpose.

Strategy Conclusion

If we are defeated in armed conflict, then we fail in our profound and decisive role in the UK's defence and security. Our purpose as an army therefore fulfils a non-discretionary national requirement.

That same purpose guides our strategy and our actions, ensuring that we are capable of addressing the threats we face today while modernising and where necessary transforming to meet the threats of tomorrow. While our institutional strategy seeks to balance this tension, the necessary effects are delivered on a daily basis by the men and women of our Army: Regulars, Reserves and Civil Servants; often in harm's way. It is therefore vitally important that our purpose is understood and valued by all of us in the Army and by the society we represent and serve.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

We hope that this short edition of *Ares & Athena* has helped those that have read it to recognise (or perhaps just revise) those seven basic thoughts that sit at the heart of understanding the simplicity of the purpose of the British Army alongside the complexity of being fit for that purpose.

- Purpose and utility are linked but different concepts. Purpose tends to be enduring, utility tends to ebb and flow according to context.

- Having a clear, enduring and commonly-held understanding of purpose is vital to any organisation (whether Army, business, sports team, or any other form of human endeavour, it does not matter). This provides the organisation with constancy of focus, with alignment, and with the vital head-mark against which to navigate the complexities of the demands placed upon it.

- Clarity of purpose is internally unifying and a core building block of any organisation's cohesion. Armies are no exception.

- Clarity of purpose permits the alignment, conceptually, morally and physically, of all of those people, agencies and elements involved in the delivery of that purpose.

- Clarity of purpose is a key tool in generating support and understanding from those upon whom an Army depends for resource, and from those for whom the Army exists.

- Having understood and agreed a clear and simple-to-understand purpose, Armies must have a clear strategy to ensure that they can deliver against the nation's aspirations and considerable investment.

- All of this matters because, if one accepts that the first duty of a government is to ensure the safety and security of its people, the Army must unfailingly succeed in its part in that national first duty.

The purpose of the British Army is to protect the United Kingdom by being ready to fight and win wars on land.

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