



# ANNIVERSARY ANALYSIS

## ASSESSING THE ONGOING DEVELOPMENT OF THE RANGER REGIMENT

### AUTHOR

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**O**N the 1st of December 2023, the UK's Ranger Regiment will mark the second anniversary of its formation. Having been conceived in the 2021 *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, the Regiment is not intended to reach full operating capacity until 2025, but has, nonetheless, spent the first two years of its existence persistently engaged alongside a variety of international partners. In its first year alone, Ranger teams deployed to more than 60 countries and, since expanding engagement to entirely new spheres of influence, this pace has not let up.

As part of the Army Special Operations Brigade, the Ranger Regiment was intended, as the evolutionary successor to the Specialised Infantry Group,

to engage in the emergent competition between states and with non-state actors over international rules and norms. This so-called 'systemic competition' was predicted to "test the line between peace and war" through a variety of subversive means, such as economic statecraft, cyber-attacks, disinformation, and proxies.<sup>1</sup> The Regiment was therefore raised to interdict such actions by conducting "special operations to train, advise and accompany partners in high threat environments" and, in doing so, would "project UK global influence and pre-empt and deter threats below the threshold of war as well as state aggression".<sup>2</sup>

The evolution of the Army Special Operations Brigade and Ranger Regiment is, of course, an ongoing process. En route to their 2025 timeline, the Regiment seeks to establish, not only

its place in the British Army's regimental precedence, but its own capabilities. However, as only the third regiment to be formed since 1945, the realisation of the Ranger concept has caused waves and faced its share of criticism from the corners of defence commentary. Detractors have expressed reservations about the Regiment's 'special' moniker, or the likelihood of ever reaching an 'accompany' or 'enable' capacity. These criticisms are rooted in valid uncertainty and worthy of address.

This article therefore intends to better understand and assess the development of the Ranger

<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Office Policy Paper, (2021), 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, defence, Development and Foreign Policy.

<sup>2</sup> Anglim, Dr S., (2021), 'Global Britain, Global Army? The Review and Land Warfare', from *The Integrated Review in Context: Defence and Security in Focus*, King's College London.

Regiment over its first two years and into the near future. It aims to analyse the British Army's success in achieving an irregular warfare capability before examining the difficulty faced by Ranger commanders in understanding the wider, overarching intent of the Regiment. In turn, this article will also seek to understand the emerging British Land Special Operations capability and evaluate the success of Rangers in achieving a 'special operations' standard. This article does not, therefore, seek to diminish the Ranger Regiment capability that exists on its second anniversary, particularly given its infancy and potential. Instead, it hopes to illustrate a number of questions and opportunities which could be addressed in the Regiment's near future to best ensure its successful realisation.

The first issue that this article will seek to explore is the extent to which the British Army and, by extension, the Ranger Regiment, effectively achieve an irregular warfare capability. Irregular, guerrilla, asymmetric or hybrid warfare is that which seeks to "avoid the strengths and exploit the vulnerabilities

<sup>3</sup>HM Government, (2022), *Army Field Manual: Irregular Warfare*, London, Pg 1-2.

<sup>4</sup>HM Government, (2022), *Army Field Manual: Irregular Warfare*, London, Pg 1-1.

<sup>5</sup>Fridman. O., (2019), 'On the Gerasimov Doctrine: Why the West Fails to Beat Russia to the Punch', in *Prism*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Washington, Pg. 106.

<sup>6</sup>Cabinet Office Policy Paper, (2021), 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, defence, Development and Foreign Policy.

<sup>7</sup>Gerasimov. V., 'The Value of Science is in the Foresight', originally published in *Military-Industrial Kurier* (2013), translated from Russian (2014) by Robert Coalsan, Editor, *Central News, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Pg 1.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, Pg 2.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.



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"ECHOES OF GREY SPACE INTERVENTION THROUGH POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, INFORMATIONAL AND OTHER MEANS HAVE BEEN BECOME THE HALLMARK OF RUSSIAN DEFENCE AND FOREIGN POLICY CAMPAIGNS. THE EUROMAIDAN PROTESTS, ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA, INTERVENTION IN THE 2016 US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND SALISBURY POISONINGS ALL REPRESENT THE BREADTH OF INFLUENCE WHICH RUSSIAN POLICY CAN EXERT."

of more powerful adversaries to weaken them and gain leverage".<sup>3</sup> Most commonly pursued in combination with conventional warfare, an irregular approach will "erode and ultimately exhaust an opponent's power, influence, legitimacy and will".<sup>4</sup> Like many of the frameworks for conflict, irregular warfare is not a new concept. Most classically represented by insurgent or asymmetric campaigns throughout history, its pedigree is well established. However, more recently, the execution of irregular warfare campaigns has shifted to an increasingly 'hybrid' format.

The concept of this hybrid form of irregular warfare is most commonly attributed to the then Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, General Valery Gerasimov, who – in 2013 – penned a contemporary approach to combat operations: *The Value of Science is in the Foresight*. Gerasimov's article, which was later popularised by Mark Galeotti and stylised as the 'Gerasimov Doctrine' was, at one point, considered as "the most useful articulation of Russia's modern strategy" and thought to provide significant insight

into this emerging nature of conflict. More recently, however, this has been contested. In 2018, Galeotti recanted the importance he placed on Gerasimov's piece and other commentators have since highlighted that Gerasimov's focus "on the continued importance of adequate investment in the development and modernization [sic] of the Russian military, its weapons and capabilities" has been lost amongst discussions of irregular warfare.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, despite the academic discourse surrounding Gerasimov's article and his intended thesis, there can be little doubt that *The Value of Science is in the Foresight* has resurrected hybrid warfare in the consciousness of contemporary defence practitioners and goes some way to explaining the movements of adversarial powers over the last decade. As such, the article remains a valuable tool in understanding contemporary irregular warfare and developments amongst the British Army to counter its effect.

In summary, Gerasimov's article introduces two notable concepts. The first is that there should now exist a state between war and

peace whereby operations may be conducted "short of open conflict" but remain adversarial in nature.<sup>6</sup> The recognition of such a "grey space" allows for the "blurring of the lines between the states of war and peace", where "wars are no longer declared".<sup>7</sup> The second concept is that "the very 'rules of war' have changed".<sup>8</sup> Instead of achieving goals through purely military means, states should use political, economic, informational, humanitarian and other non-military measures, "applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population".<sup>9</sup> As Gerasimov explains: "The role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness."<sup>10</sup> Since 2013, echoes of grey space intervention through political, economic, informational and other means have been become the hallmark of Russian and, later Chinese, defence and foreign policy campaigns. The 2013 Euromaidan protests, the 2014 annexation of Crimea, the intervention in the 2016 US Presidential elections and the 2018 Salisbury poisonings

therefore all represent the breadth of influence which Russian policy can exert, without effecting a formal state of conflict. Although less militarily focused, Chinese economic policy, exercised through debt-diplomacy and its Belt-and-Road initiative, represents a similar capacity.

The recognition by the 2021 *Integrated Review* of these adversarial actions and its efforts to “adapt to a more competitive

<sup>11</sup> *Cabinet Office Policy Paper, (2021), ‘Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, defence, Development and Foreign Policy.*

<sup>12</sup> *Allison. G., (2021), ‘The British Army’s New Ranger Regiment – What Will They be Used For?’, UK Defence Journal.*

<sup>13</sup> *Anglim. Dr S., (2021), ‘Global Britain, Global Army? The Review and Land Warfare’, from The Integrated Review in Context: Defence and Security in Focus, King’s College London.*

<sup>14</sup> *Anglim. Dr S. (2022), ‘The Review and The Army Revisited: The Implications of the War in Ukraine’ from The Integrated Review in Context: One Year On, King’s College London.*

<sup>15</sup> *McFate. S., (2014), ‘Goliath’, London, Penguin, Pg. 6.*

<sup>16</sup> *Anglim. Dr S. (2022), ‘The Review and The Army Revisited: The Implications of the War in Ukraine’ from The Integrated Review in Context: One Year On, King’s College London.*

and fluid international environment” were therefore laudable.<sup>11</sup> It sought, in part, to address “the intensification of competition between states and with non-state actors” by establishing the Ranger Regiment to “deter adversaries and contribute to collective deterrence by training and advising and – if necessary – accompanying partners in support of... national interests.”<sup>12</sup>

The Ranger Regiment was not, however, formed in isolation. Whilst emergent hybrid threats had created the conditions for a British irregular response, significant financial restrictions and an unexpected conclusion to the so-called Global War on Terror following the 2021 coalition withdrawal from Afghanistan had also dissuaded many Western administrations from expeditionary military campaigning. As Dr Simon Anglim wrote in 2021: “There is a growing tendency by Western powers to apply military force ‘remotely’ or ‘discreetly’. Risk aversion among the Western political class and distrust of politicians among the voting public following the debacles of Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya

combine with shrinking defence budgets to incentivise Western governments to wage war via ‘remoted’ means... all having limited physical and political footprint – rather than via large numbers of ‘boots on the ground.’”<sup>13</sup>

The prevailing winds were, therefore, shifting away from large-scale conventional warfare. In November 2021, the then Prime Minister Boris Johnson asserted to the House of Commons Liaison Committee that “we have to recognise that the old concepts of fighting big tank battles on the European landmass... are over”.<sup>14</sup> Despite protestations from members that ‘you can’t hold ground with cyber’, the British Army increasingly sought to adapt and counter an emergent hybrid irregular threat, most notably through the establishment of the Ranger Regiment, which sought to reflect a paradigm shift away from the Army’s emphasis on warfighting to focus on persistently operating

in the grey zone to counter hostile state actors and violent extremist organisations. In fact, so significant was this prevailing trend, that many began to interpret the shift in conflict as a Fukuyama-esque, ‘end of history’ moment. One such revisionist, Sean McFate, went further, proclaiming in his book, *Goliath: Why the West Doesn’t Win Wars*, that “conventional war is dead”.<sup>15</sup>

However, arguably, this paradigm shift was short lived. Only two months after the formation of the Ranger Regiment, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine firmly re-established large-scale manoeuvre warfare as British Defence’s top priority. Nonetheless, whilst it could be argued that “the war in Ukraine has left the emperors of ‘conventional warfare is dead’ with no clothes”, British Defence refused to throw the hybrid baby out with the revisionist bathwater.<sup>16</sup> Instead, in its 2023 *Integrated Review Refresh*, His Majesty’s Government reiterated its intention to respond to the “intensification of systemic

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competition”, which was then judged to be the “dominant geopolitical trend and the main driver of the deteriorating security environment”.<sup>17</sup> More specifically, it highlighted the need for British Defence to “create the conditions for an open and stable international order, by shaping, balancing, competing and cooperating in those regions most likely to be affected by our adversaries”.<sup>18</sup>

There is, therefore, a clear mandate for the British Army and, specifically, the Ranger Regiment, to spearhead government efforts to influence the grey space of systemic competition by engaging in the contemporary manifestation of hybrid irregular warfare. However, at this point in the Regiment’s development, this has not been fully realised. Instead, in its first two years of operational activity, much of the work undertaken by Ranger teams has fallen within the realm of military assistance and, arguably, resembles the advisory taskings conducted by their antecedent Specialised Infantry Battalions. There are, of course, exceptions. The development of regional networks which has accompanied persistent engagement has enabled the placement of liaison officers in numerous strategic hotspots. This has, in turn, established a strategic reconnaissance capability beyond the reach of other Government or coalition assets – most notably in West Africa. Nonetheless, the

<sup>17</sup>HM Government, (2023), ‘Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World’, London, Pg 8 para 10.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, Pg 17.

<sup>19</sup>US Department of Defense, (2020), ‘Summary of the Irregular Warfare Annex to the National Defense Strategy’, Washington, Pg 3 & 6.

<sup>20</sup>Walters. Dr D., (2022), ‘Irregular Warfare Centre’, [irregularwarfarecenter.org](http://irregularwarfarecenter.org), (accessed 01/11/23).

<sup>21</sup>HM Government, (2022), ‘Army Field Manual: Irregular Warfare’, London, foreword.

Regiment is still falling short of its original concept of employment and of its aspirations.

This deficiency, which currently exists within the British Army’s irregular warfare capability, can, however, be explained by two reparable failings. Firstly, as it stands, there is still a lack of understanding and guidance as to the role and function of irregular warfare within British Defence.

In 2018, the US National Defense Strategy highlighted the changing character of warfare in a manner which the UK’s 2021 *Integrated Review* would later reflect. Confronted with an evolving and relevant battlespace, the Department of Defense subsequently produced its 2020 *Irregular Warfare Annex to the National Defense Strategy*. This annex, intended to complement the existing National Defense Strategy, acknowledged that “the Department must institutionalise irregular warfare as a core competency for both conventional and special operations forces”, whilst vowing to “train, educate, and develop our people to ensure sufficient expertise in irregular warfare as part of our operational culture”.<sup>19</sup> This ambition was subsequently realised in 2022, with the establishment of the US Irregular Warfare Center, which “serves as the central mechanism for developing the Department of Defense’s irregular warfare knowledge and advancing the Department’s understanding of irregular warfare concepts and doctrine in collaboration with key allies and partners”, thereby formalising the US Army’s conceptual and practical education and application of irregular warfare.<sup>20</sup>

By stark contrast, there is a dearth of understanding or guidance within the British Army as to how to realise its irregular warfare ambitions. As it stands, British irregular thinking is guided by only a limited



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array of doctrine including the July 2019 *Army Field Manual: Counter-Irregular Activity*, and the June 2022 *Army Field Manual: Irregular Warfare*. On occasion, these documents are reinforced by partially relevant publications primarily concerned with military assistance, capacity building and security force assistance, but almost all British thought approaches irregular warfare from the perspective of counter-irregular activity rather than from that of a practitioner. This is concerning. Not only because “the core tenet of the manoeuvrist approach seeks indirect methods and therefore reflects the thinking that underpins irregular warfare” but because irregular warfare remains so pertinent to the future operating environment.<sup>21</sup> There is a well established pedigree for irregular warfare in the British Army and not only is there much scope to formalise these experiences as the basis of contemporary irregular thought, but there is also a willing audience for its lessons.

Secondly, there remains no clear and comprehensive irregular strategy towards which Ranger planners and commanders are contributing. Whilst it is recognised that the character of warfare is changing and accepted that British Defence should be competing in the grey

zone, a lack of irregular thought and understanding – on the part of our first failing – has resulted in a lack of clarity on how to achieve this. As we have discussed, the first two years of the Ranger concept have seen dozens of Ranger teams contribute to specialist task lines across a plethora of regions and partners. However, what we have not yet discussed is the bottom-up generation of many of these tasks. Indeed, much of the identification and capitalisation of Ranger task lines are as a result of relationships developed by the junior officer, non-commissioned officer or Ranger ‘on the spot’ – most commonly under the guidance or upon the recommendation of the defence attaché or loan service officers. Having identified a specialist force which offers a reputable prospective partner in the region, Rangers will seek to cultivate a relationship, often with the ambition of establishing a lasting task line in assistance of that partner’s training needs.

However, the training and work conducted by Ranger teams alongside partners will vary as much as the security environment within each of the Ranger battalion’s area of operations. For 1 and 2 Ranger, for example, much of the work undertaken in West and East Africa is conducted with the intent of countering

violent extremist organisations in the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin and Somalia.<sup>22</sup> This work is frequently conducted at significant reach, with limited medical cover and in semi-permissive environments which present significant security considerations. By contrast, much of 3 Ranger's task lines involve partnering with well-established NATO Special Operations Forces units and often focuses on hostile state actors and national resilience or resistance operations. These tasks can often take place in regions with medical coverage comparable to the UK, but where the security threat is typically posed by hostile state intelligence gathering. Therefore, whilst bottom-up task generation and the adaptation of Ranger teams to train and operate in a variety of environments should be celebrated, the differences between 1 and 3 Ranger's area of operations and tasks serves to illustrate that significant work is being conducted within the Regiment with very few unifying characteristics other than the intent to gain, maintain or effect His Majesty's Government's influence. Of course, achieving 'influence' might realise the 2023 *Integrated Review Refresh's* objective of introducing "greater emphasis on the role of the wider levers of state power" but it must also be remembered that "influence should not be set as an objective in itself".<sup>23</sup> Instead, "the exercise of influence is a means to an end" and, as Joseph Nye famously asserts in his discussions around the concept of soft power, must always be an extension of existing hard power.<sup>24</sup>

This does not mean to say that there is not value in 'being in the room'. Many Rangers will be familiar with the photo-shoots and media releases which often

accompany the tactical actions of our partners, and there is much to be gained from being in the right place, at the right time, and in the right kit. However, we should be seeking to achieve more. The Regiment's ambition and intent have matured, and the means employed must evolve with it. As Jack Watling asserts: "The development of strategic partnerships between the UK and partner states cannot rest on the token delivery of 'military training'."<sup>25</sup>

However, the British Army is not alone in its struggle to cohere its irregular campaigning in the systemic competition environment. As Dr Jonathan Schroden wrote for West Point's Modern Warfare Institute: "In some ways, the current environment surrounding the notion of competition campaigning is reminiscent of the immediate aftermath of 9/11... There was a strong impetus to get after the problem of terrorism, but with minimal strategic guidance. Today, the special operations enterprise... is lacking the translation of ideas like 'strategic competition' and 'campaigning' to tactical actions via a clear framework of activities and associated authorities, policies, permission, and oversights."<sup>26</sup>

As Schroden reiterated before the US Senate's Armed Service Committee in June of this year, "policy makers have not clearly articulated the goals for, and

**"THE REGIMENT'S AMBITION AND INTENT HAVE MATURED, AND THE MEANS EMPLOYED MUST EVOLVE WITH IT."**

desired effects of, competition".<sup>27</sup> Over the past two years, Ranger teams have therefore proven their ability to execute the means of systemic competition in a hybrid irregular battlespace. However, without a coherent end state for the activity which they are conducting, those teams will continue to meet the requests and requirements of regional partners, which may become increasingly divergent from a coordinated Ranger effort.

As such, if formations such as 6th (UK) Division or Land Special Operations cannot distil ministerial discourse down to tactical intent, then they should make every effort to identify comprehensive direction for the Regiment themselves. Failure to do so leaves commanders at the lowest level adrift and forces them to engage with partner forces with only the vapid direction of "building long-term ties across shared interests".<sup>28</sup>

However, despite the British Army's failure to understand and formalise irregular warfare guidance, and its failure to cohere an overarching strategic framework for its irregular ambitions, this article does acknowledge the significant effort and investment made by the British Army in the conception and creation of Land Special Operations capable formations. The recognition by British Defence in May 2021 that the formation of land and joint Special Operations Forces capabilities could "take on operations of lower visibility and enhanced complexity to release Tier One Special Forces to pursue the most challenging threats" was an important development.<sup>29</sup>

Not only did its realisation address an opportunity unfulfilled by existing specialised formations, such as the Special Forces Support Group, without infringing on historical operational commitments, but the fruition of a British Special Operations Force which operates at a level of risk and discretion higher than that of the wider Army, but lower than that of UK Special Forces and its supporting

<sup>22</sup>British Army, (2023), 'Who are the Ranger Regiment?', [army.mod.uk/who-we-are/corps-regiments-and-units/ranger-regiment/](https://army.mod.uk/who-we-are/corps-regiments-and-units/ranger-regiment/), (accessed 20/11/2023).

<sup>23</sup>HM Government, (2023), 'Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World', London, Pg 33, Para 2 and HM Government, (2016), 'The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary', London, Pg 198, Para 834

<sup>24</sup>HM Government, (2016), 'The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary', London, Pg 198, Para 834. And Li. E., (2018), 'The Rise and Fall of soft Power', Foreign Policy, [foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/20/the-rise-and-fall-of-soft-power](https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/20/the-rise-and-fall-of-soft-power) (accessed 20/11/23).

<sup>25</sup>Watling, J., (2022), 'The Utility of Land Power to the British State', *RUSI Whitehall Report 2-22*, RUSI, London, Pg 19

<sup>26</sup>Schroden, J., (2023), 'Competition Campaigning: What it Looks Like and Implications for US Special Operations Command', *Modern War Institute at West Point*, [mwi.westpoint.edu/competition-campaigning-what-it-looks-like-and-implications-for-us-special-operations-command/](https://mwi.westpoint.edu/competition-campaigning-what-it-looks-like-and-implications-for-us-special-operations-command/), (accessed 05/11/23).

<sup>27</sup>Schroden, J., (2023), 'How Can Special Operations Forces Contribute to Strategic Competition?', *CAN Communications*, [cna.org/our-media/indepth/2023/06/how-can-special-operations-forces-contribute-to-interstate-competition](https://cna.org/our-media/indepth/2023/06/how-can-special-operations-forces-contribute-to-interstate-competition), (accessed 06/11/23).

<sup>28</sup>HM Government, (2023), 'Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World', London, Pg 20, para 8.

<sup>29</sup>HM Government, (2021), 'Land Special Operations Headmark Concept Paper', London.



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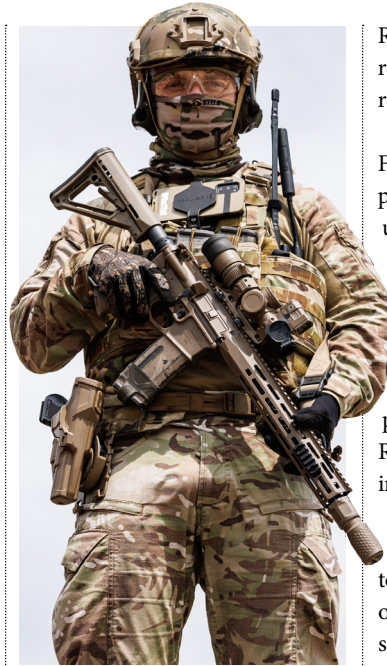
elements, opened the British Army up to a variety of partner forces previously unengaged with.

Since then, the Army has continued to invest in the development of the Land Special Operations concept. Its re-subordination of Land Special Operations and Army Special Operations Brigade from 6th (UK) Division to Field Army troops from 1st December 2023 is intended to “re-centralise specialist capabilities at the three-star Field Army Component level and unlock the potential of Land Special Operations” but will also place Land Special Operations and Army Special Operations Brigade in a command relationship reflective of that which was previously enjoyed by 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team, and significantly raise the Brigade’s operating profile.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, *Future Soldier: Next Steps*, the follow-on directive to the Army’s 2021 reshaping, has similarly ambitious future intentions to align Land Special Operations with British commitments to the NATO New Force Model. The existing NATO Response Force, which is rebranding to the New Force Model this year, requires rotational commitments of air, land, sea, and Special Operations Forces units to a very high readiness task force for up to 12 months. The Army’s intention for the Ranger Regiment and Land Special Operations to achieve NATO Special Operations Forces accreditation and contribute to the New Force Model’s Special Operations Component Command by 2026, therefore represents, not only the British Army’s ambitions for Land Special Operations formations, but also its commitment to the continued development of this capability. The British Army’s investment into a Land Special Operations concept is not, however, only limited to reforming command relationships or operational commitments. The purchase of the Knight’s Armament

“THE PURCHASE OF THE KNIGHT’S ARMAMENT KS-1 RIFLES FOR ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS BRIGADE REPRESENTED A £90 MILLION STEP TO INCREASE LETHALITY AND INTEROPERABILITY WITH PARTNER FORCES, WHILST ALSO GENTLY RECOGNISING THE IMPORTANCE OF VISUAL PROFILE TO THE CREDIBILITY OF BRITISH SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES.”

KS-1 rifles for Army Special Operations Brigade represented a £90 million step to increase lethality and interoperability with partner forces, whilst also gently recognising the importance of visual profile to the credibility of British Special Operations Forces. Moreover, the acquisition of Crye Precision clothing systems, XACT NV33 night vision devices, Android team awareness kit and plans to procure suitable tactical mobility platforms and tactical communications and information systems and operational communications information systems ‘communication architecture’, reaffirms the British Army’s conviction in developing and equipping its Land Special Operations formations.

However, despite significant enthusiasm and investment from the highest levels, there remain reservations around the Ranger Regiment’s ascension from Specialised Infantry to Special Operations. At a time when many infantry battalions were combatting the threat of amalgamation or disbandment, the Rangers received an unprecedented level of investment and acclamation from the wider Army. The Ranger’s conception in the 2021 *Integrated*



*Review*, for example, not only coincided with the re-designation of 2nd Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment as the ‘next generation combat team’, but with the announcement of the complete disbandment of 2nd Battalion, The Mercian Regiment.

The favour received by the Rangers and the scepticism which such favour inspires, must not be underestimated. Although the concept’s development is unrelated to the changes felt by those battalions, Rangers should recognise the standards and expectations set upon them by those who feel dispossessed or relegated by the Regiment’s formation and should seek to perform accordingly. Typically, an assessment of a given unit’s performance is inferred from the placement of a unit’s attendees on the Infantry Battle School’s junior and senior courses and, whilst Junior and Senior Brecon are not necessarily reflective of the Ranger role, the understanding and execution of battlecraft is key to underpinning the reputation and expertise of those within Special Operations. Nonetheless, anecdotal evidence and personal experience within a Ranger Company would suggest that Ranger attendees are not always achieving to a level which the

Regiment has been entrusted to reach. This is concerning for two reasons.

Firstly, from a reputational point of view, the battle courses undertaken by junior and senior non-commissioned officers may represent the only opportunity they have in their career to interact with individuals from units other than their own. A poor representation of the Ranger Regiment will leave a lasting impression which is unlikely to be remedied at a later date. This poor impression is also likely to affect that non-commissioned officer’s support of individuals seeking to attempt the Ranger qualification process and could further affect the recruitment of capable individuals from reputable units. The difficulties the Ranger Regiment has faced with recruitment have, thus far, been offset with enthusiastic Gurkha candidates. In fact, so significant has Gurkha interest been in the Rangers, that 3 Ranger is now the only battalion without an exclusive Gurkha Company. However, this is a temporary solution. Gurkhas have made exceptional Rangers but issues with clearances and visas have presented difficulties beyond their control, but in need of resolution. Disappointing Ranger performances on Brecon battle courses can therefore present a disproportionate risk not only to the Regiment’s reputation, but to its recruiting prospects.

Secondly, sub-optimal Ranger performances at the Infantry Battle School undermine the ‘special’ capability the Regiment seeks to own. As we have discussed, much of the Regiment’s work is currently conducted in a military assistance capacity. As Rangers, the Regiment has the privilege of conducting this assistance

<sup>30</sup>HM Government, (2023), ‘Re-Subordination of Army Special Operations Brigade from 6th (UK) Div into Fd Army Troops Implementation Order’, *Andover*.

alongside primarily 'specialist' partners, typically at reach and increased risk. It is also this privilege which differentiates the Ranger capability from the emergent Security Force Assistance battalions. These battalions, which specialise in overt military assistance task lines in centralised locations, with a lower risk appetite, exclusively partner with conventional forces. As the Security Force Assistance battalions continue to expand their operational output, however, there is an increased likelihood of Ranger and Security Force Assistance task lines coinciding in space and time. Specialist partners training alongside Ranger counterparts will, therefore, be unimpressed if their conventional counterparts appear to be under the tutelage of visually more impressive or professional British formations. A great deal of effort and money has gone into acquiring the appropriate kit and equipment to equate Rangers to their specialist partners, but there remains a level of personal investment which members of the Regiment should be expected to make.

Aside from personal investment, however, the Ranger Regiment does continue to make significant progress in developing a formal training pipeline more appropriate for a special operations formation. Despite the 2021 *Integrated Review's* failure to resource a dedicated Army Special Operations training solution for its newly established Special Operations capability, the establishment of the Army Special Operations Training Centre sought to temporarily address training deficiencies for Ranger applicants. The eventual re-subordination of the Army Special Operations Training Centre from general officer commanding 6th (UK) Division to the Combat Manoeuvre Centre, subsequently ensured that the re-named Land Special Operations Training Centre

would "deliver an efficient and 'Defence Systems Approach to Training' compliant training pathway for Land Special Operations capabilities within the Land Warfare Centre".<sup>31</sup> More recently, the Land Special Operations Training Centre has continued to oversee the two-week Ranger assessment cadre and the evolving ten-week All Arms Ranger Course, both of which select applicants for placement within the Regiment.

For those applicants selected to join the Ranger Regiment there is also a significant amount of collective training undertaken to up-skill specialist disciplines otherwise unavailable to those in the wider Army. Rangers are eligible to conduct training on Land Special Operations specific communication and vehicle platforms, as well as advanced medical training equitable to that of NATO allies. Similarly, Army Special Operations Brigade G7 components have conducted a considerable amount of work to deliver training courses to up-skill Ranger personnel in areas indispensable to Ranger teams eventually conducting accompany and enable task lines. Some courses in disciplines such as demolitions and joint fires, which were traditionally maintained and delivered by trade training establishments and restricted attendance on the basis of rank or cap badge, have now been refined to a relevant curriculum, legitimised in conjunction with those establishments and subsequently delivered to Ranger personnel. As such, not only are individuals able to formally train on their specialist roles and responsibilities within the teams, but the experience of that training will continue to legitimise Ranger personnel in the eyes of our partner forces.

The progress made by the Ranger Regiment in its first two years of existence has, therefore, been staggering. Significant investment

by Government and the British Army has resulted in the formation of a British Special Operations Force capability which is increasingly trained, equipped and commanded to meaningfully engage in the grey space of systemic competition alongside international partners and allies. On its current trajectory, the Ranger Regiment will continue to enhance its reputation amongst prospective partners through persistent engagement across a variety of operational theatres and generate additional trust in its ability to operate at the appropriate levels.

However, as its 2025 full operational capability timeline acknowledges, there is still much to achieve to realise a fully functional and reputable British Special Operations Force capability. Detractors of the Regiment will readily highlight course performances and hesitant recruiting figures to undermine the 'special' moniker bestowed upon the Rangers, and with some justification. However, at its two-year anniversary, the Regiment is still on course to address these issues in time to realise its full operational capability deadline. The implementation of further training specific to Land Special Operations will not only distinguish Rangers from colleagues in the wider Army, but form a more tangible identity, and esprit de corps, amongst Ranger battalions. In time, specialised training, regimental identity and elevated standards will begin to attract more and more applicants seeking opportunity beyond the fold of conventional units and firmly establish the Ranger's place as a Special Operations Force.

Instead, the greater threat to the Ranger Regiment's success comes from the direction and guidance it receives with regards to the conduct of systemic competition. Naturally, there is great value in providing military assistance to



specialist allies and partners. The pursuance of a primarily military assistance approach will continue to develop the Regiment's network of relationships and, in turn, its ability to conduct strategic reconnaissance. However, it should be recognised that from the perspective of those at the tactical level, the Ranger Regiment's strategic ambitions appear limited to achieving NATO Special Operations Forces accreditation prior to its 2026 Special Operations Component Command commitments, and "building long-term ties".<sup>32</sup> As such, there are notable gaps in the UK's involvement in the grey space of hybrid irregular warfare. Some of these gaps will be addressed in time. The extent to which Rangers can participate in enable and accompany task lines for example, is entirely related to the specialist training received by those Rangers, and the level of risk that training underwrites. However, more of these gaps are due to a lack of understanding and practice in the execution of hybrid warfare. Much time and effort has been devoted to the development of the physical component of the Ranger Regiment. Berets, stable belts, tactical recognition flashes, vehicle platforms, weapon systems and command structures are all well understood. However, little has been invested in the conceptual and, by extension, moral approach the Regiment should take to irregular warfare. The British Army has therefore created an increasingly formidable irregular asset. It should now concentrate its efforts into understanding how to use it.

<sup>31</sup>HM Government, (2022), 'Re-Subordinate the Interim Army Special Operations Training Centre from OPCOM GOC 6th (UK) Div to OPCOM DLW Implementation Order', *Andover*.

<sup>32</sup>HM Government, (2023), 'Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World', *London*.