Are the Armed Forces Understood and Supported by the Public? A View from the UK

Abstract:

Despite the importance of public opinion in supporting the military and their missions, little is known about how the UK public perceive their Armed Forces. This paper reviews and evaluates what is currently known about public attitudes towards the UK military and situates the material within the framework of the civil-military gap literature. Current evidence suggests that public regard for the UK Armed Forces is high despite low levels of support for the Iraq and Afghanistan missions and that public understanding of the work of the Armed Forces is limited. Nonetheless, the UK's long history of military deployments may have given the public an 'intuitive understanding' of the basic realities of the military compared with some other European states. Although there are indications of differences in attitudes between the UK Armed Forces and wider British society there is no firm evidence that the civil-military 'gap' has become a 'gulf' as claimed by some military leaders.

Keywords: Public opinion, UK Armed Forces, civil-military gap

Introduction

Introduction
The United Kingdom (UK) Armed Forces have a well-established tradition of engagement in military operations that extends back into Britain's imperial past. The military has long been a key focus of interest for both the UK public and media, but this has strengthened in recent years as a result of their involvement in over a decade of intense operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet despite this development, how supportive the public are, or how much they understand of the UK Armed Forces remains unclear.

How the public perceive their Armed Forces is important for a range of reasons. Public opinion plays an important role in supporting defence and foreign policy.[1] Public attitudes can also influence recruitment and retention in the Armed Forces as well as how Service leavers transition back into civilian society, all concerns expressed by the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force (RAF) and the British Army.[2] Given these issues, it is surprising that there is currently little knowledge on the subject of UK public attitudes towards the Armed Forces. While there is some robust research in the US and other European countries on these issues, in the UK the majority of studies have been conducted via opinion polls. More in-depth or nationally representative data are infrequent in comparison with other nations and it is only recently that public attitudes to the military were included in the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, the most influential survey of public opinion in Britain.[3]

By drawing on evidence from the BSA survey, as well as a wide-ranging literature review[4], we describe what is currently known about UK public opinion of the Armed Forces. Key aspects of public support have been selected as metrics of UK public attitudes; public support and pride in the UK Armed Forces, voluntary donations to Service charities, support for defence spending, public understanding of the Armed Forces. This evidence is blended with understandings about the civil-military gap within the UK context in order to build a wider picture of UK public support and understanding for the Armed Forces.

The paper begins with an examination of the historical context of the relationship between the UK public and the Armed Forces in order to frame our understanding of current public attitudes. We proceed to discuss the 'civil-military gap' theory and its relevance for an analysis of relations between the Armed Forces and society in the UK. Current knowledge on public understanding and support of the military will then be presented and summarised. Finally, gaps in the knowledge base and areas for future research are identified.

The historical context of UK public support for the Armed Forces

The relationship between the UK public and the UK Armed Forces has not always been an easy one. As an island country based primarily on maritime power, there have only been occasional risks of invasion[5], with much of the work of the Armed Forces taking place overseas in defence of the British Empire.[6] The consequent absence of a military presence in everyday society meant that the relationship between the public and the Armed Forces was initially fractured, with relatively ambivalent public attitudes towards the UK military. Soldiers became better known for the trouble that they caused in garrison towns during peacetime than their service, and were frequently viewed as a group to be tolerated until they were required.[7]

This initial disconnection in the relationship between the public and the Armed Forces changed during the 20th century. War can often be a time when a nation unites in defence of its shared beliefs and way of life, and for the UK public, the First and Second World Wars were no exception.[8] Few families were

left untouched. Experience of direct military service spread throughout society with defence of the nation becoming an almost universal experience. Sons, fathers and brothers were called up to active military service and women also participated, serving in non-combat roles in the women's' branches of all three services; the largest, the Woman's Royal Air Force (WRAF), had 250,000 members between 1939 and 1945 alone.[9] While war weariness affected public morale following the First World War[10], Nazism in the 1930's and 1940's posed a clear moral and physical threat to the UK. Although evidence is lacking, it is likely that this helped to rally support for the Armed Forces during a mission that was seen, at least in the West, as a just and necessary war.

The end of the Second World War brought about a number of changes to the structure of the Armed Forces and the missions in which they were engaged. While defence remained a central focus for the government and society during the Cold War and the UK's contribution to NATO's deterrence of the Soviet Union, this was accompanied by a variety of small-scale imperial and post-imperial military campaigns, including counter-terror operations in Northern Ireland. Conscription ended in the UK in 1963[11] at a time when the nature of the missions assigned to the UK Armed Forces began to transform. The geo-political changes following the fall of the Berlin wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union meant that engagement in classic inter-state war declined, with the partial exception of the Falklands War during the early 1980s (the last case of 'industrial war' for the UK until the Gulf war of 1991).[12] The end of the Cold War shifted the primary focus of the UK Armed Forces from defence of UK territory and countering alliances in the Eastern Bloc towards participation in military operations as part of multi-lateral forces under the auspices of the United Nations or NATO.[13] The goals and objectives of these "new missions" concentrated on peace enforcement, humanitarian relief, stabilisation and democracy building, as well as counter-terror and counter-insurgency operations.[14] As these missions became increasingly specialised, the need for a large, easily mobilised military declined, prompting the UK Armed Forces to adjust their organisational structure and approach and leading to the emergence of a smaller, more agile and highly trained all-volunteer military service which was better suited to participation in such missions.[15] Economic pressures on public expenditure added a financial rationale for reductions in force levels and a rationalisation of the organizational design of the military.[16]

These changes in the goals and structure of the Armed Forces had implications for public support for military operations and the military themselves. Historically, conflicts based on territorial disputes were underpinned by a clearly identifiable, 'existential' threat or risk from external forces. Such missions often have greater legitimacy[17] and, as a consequence, higher levels of public support for the Armed Forces[18] derived from the patriotism invoked during such campaigns. Contemporary missions, on the other hand, frequently have aims that are more diffuse, complex or protean – the mission in Afghanistan being the most striking example. The resulting public uncertainty about involvement in such campaigns is often accompanied by grudging acceptance rather than widespread support.[19] With public opinion playing an important role in foreign policy, poor support for current military missions can also limit the involvement of the UK Armed Forces in future campaigns. For example, it is likely that the public's decreasing support for and perceived lack of success during the Iraq and Afghanistan missions[20] has contributed to both the public's and political elite's reluctance to become involved militarily in the crises in Syria and Mali.[21] With a formal conclusion to major UK combat operations in Afghanistan in April 2014, there is concern amongst political and military leaders that the currently strong levels of public support of the Armed Forces might fade into indifference. There are particular concerns that once further reductions in the size of the military following the 2015 Security and Defence Review are made, the Armed Forces – and especially the British Army, hitherto the largest of the three Services – could become increasingly disconnected from, and irrelevant, to the general population. This issue of potential disconnections between the Armed Forces and the general public stems from the concept of the "civil-military" gap, a theory which helps elucidate differences between the public and

Armed Forces and the important implications of these on public support of the military, their missions and government policy.

The Civil-Military Gap and Attempts to Bridge

The 'civil-military gap' describes the social distance that can arise between the Armed Forces and civilians from a lack of contact and shared experiences, and the implications for mutual understanding and support.[22] In this paper, discussion will focus on the differences in cultures, experiences and demographics between the military and civil society in order to explore the impact that the civil-military gap may have on public perceptions of the UK Armed Forces. It is important to note that the term can also refer to connections between the military and the government: for example, experience of military service amongst current UK politicians is low, which may negatively affect the allocation of resources towards the military and support for certain defence policies; the last UK defence minister with military service left office in 1992.[23] However, consideration of this aspect of the gap is beyond the scope of this paper.

The question of the civil-military 'gap' arose in the US, firstly in the debate between Huntington and Janowitz in the 1960s and 1970s. This addressed how far a military, necessarily conservative in its culture due to the functional imperatives of war, could afford to adjust to the increasingly liberal values of wider society, or whether society itself should become more conservative in order to bolster the military and its capacity to deter and if necessary prevail against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Scholars in Europe and elsewhere began asking whether their own societies had experienced or were likely to experience similar problems, leading to the internationalisation of the 'civil-military gap' theory. Consensus regarding the answer to this question is still lacking.[24]

The issue of the civil-military gap is complex, and it is not easy to disentangle and operationalise the different facets of diverging cultures, experiences and demographics between the military and civil society.[25] Although the extent of the gap in the UK is hard to operationalise, there are a number of examples that demonstrate the differences between civilian and military norms. The Army has expressed concerns that the lack of contact with the military and the social changes associated with the shift away from traditional labour-intensive manual occupations[26] means that new recruits often do not understand the expectations placed upon them.[27] Legal and social pressures[28] from society have forced the Armed Forces to alter a number of practices, overriding military concerns about operational effectiveness[29]; military dismissal for homosexuality was overturned following the intervention of the European Court of Human Rights in 2000[30] and employment opportunities for women have been extended, although the debate regarding their formal admission to ground combat roles is on-going.[31] Litigation against the military is increasing, with adverse events during combat operations now much more open to legal action from Service personnel, their families or representatives.[32] A Supreme Court ruling in 2013, confirming that the MOD can be sued for negligence regarding the provision of inadequate equipment during missions' means that human rights legislation can now be applied more fully in military spaces and the longstanding norm of combat immunity now being interpreted more narrowly.[33]

The potential disconnections in these areas arising from the 'gap' are of particular concern to the Armed Forces who rely on public support to maintain morale.[34] Disquiet amongst the UK military was so high that in 2007, the then Army Chief of General Staff, General (later Lord) Dannatt suggested that the traditional civil-military gap had escalated into a 'gulf'.[35] A number of perceived consequences were outlined, including a lack of public understanding of the experiences of those who had served and indifference to their achievements.[36] Dannatt was not alone in holding these views, with both the former Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Mike Jackson, and the British commander in Iraq during 2006,

Major-General Richard Shirreff, expressing dissatisfaction with the current relationship between the Armed Forces and the public.[37]

Concerns about the civil-military gap stem from the broader background of British military history and traditions. In countries without conscription, such as the UK, it is generally accepted that contact between society and the Armed Forces tends to be lower.[38] For example, in the UK only 7% of 17-24 year olds report they have a member of their family serving in the military.[39] Along with the end of conscription comes concerns about lower levels of understanding of the military[40], which has spurred debate within other European countries such as Austria, Switzerland, France and Sweden about how conversion to an all-volunteer force may affect public understanding and appreciation of military life.[41] In the UK, the introduction of an all-volunteer force in the early 1960s occurred at a similar time to the beginning of wider cultural changes within the Western world. This shift towards what was subsequently referred to as a "post-modern" mind-set, with a greater focus on autonomy and personal fulfilment[42] increasingly separated public attitudes from traditional military values of self-sacrifice, unit cohesion, obedience and loyalty to the Crown; attributes the Armed Forces argue are necessary for operational effectiveness.[43] As most recently demonstrated by the overt public opposition towards the 2001 Afghanistan conflict and 2003-2009 Iraq campaign[44], there has also been an increased questioning of tradition and less deference to authority[45], with the public progressively more likely to question involvement in military campaigns or the evidence provided to support deployment of the UK Armed Forces. Combined with a decrease in direct contact between members of the public and military personnel, these wider cultural changes and differences in cultural norms and beliefs are likely to have contributed to the civil-military gap in the UK.

The strongest indication of the apprehension around the civil-military gap in the UK is the introduction of the Armed Forces Covenant.[46] The levels of public support and understanding, and in particular how this might impact on recruitment, are an issue for all three military services, but for the Army, concerns were such that a document on the mutual obligations of the public, the government and the Armed Forces was developed as there was a concern that some new recruits had only a vague idea of what military life entailed.[47] Indeed, the development of the Covenant was tied up with the Army's defence of its professional space from outside incursions and of its interests during the wars of 9/11.[48] This formed the basis for the Armed Forces Covenant[49], which underpins the UK government's strategy to address the civil-military gap.

The introduction of the Armed Forces Covenant into UK legislation in 2011[50] followed a period of extensive public debate regarding the treatment of injured veterans and strong political pressure from military and political leaders. The Covenant serves to set out the rights and obligations of the Armed Forces, the government and the public in relation to the sacrifices made by those serving in the Armed Forces while partially protecting military practices from the interference of society.[51] Public support appears to be strong, and polls show that in 2011, 62% agreed it was important for the Covenant to be enshrined in law in order to protect the welfare of the Armed Force and their families.

As with the Social Compact in the US[52], the Covenant seeks to ensure there is provision from the state for the Armed Forces and their families, but has stimulated discussion about the support that the military currently receive, and perhaps more importantly what they need, in a way that the Social Compact never has. Debates around government support for the Armed Forces have been driven by media stories about the treatment of military personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan[53] and high-profile campaigns such as the Royal British Legion's "Honour the Covenant" campaign.[54] Much of the conversation has focussed on the Government's duty of care towards individuals who have served their country, and this focus is reflected in the view of 68% of the public polled that 'if the Prime Minister makes a promise to the Armed Forces, he should keep it regardless of external circumstances' (see

table). It is not clear how successful discussion of the Covenant has been in informing public opinion on the relationship and respective obligations between the Armed Forces and the general public.[55] Public support for the Covenant at the time of its introduction appeared to be strong; polls show that, 62% of the public agree it was important for the Covenant to be enshrined in law in order to protect the welfare of the Armed Force and their families. A report by the MOD, however, found that 61% of the public report knowing nothing about the Covenant (see table), suggesting that it may have not gone far enough in meeting the initial aims of emphasising the public obligations towards the Armed Forces and that further efforts may be needed.

The Armed Forces Covenant has given rise to other efforts by the UK government to address the civil-military gap. The Armed Forces Community Covenant, adapted from a US strategy for increasing public engagement[56], encourages communities to support local military personnel in their area and improve public understanding of issues affecting the Armed Forces.[57] Veterans Day has been renamed Armed Forces Day in order to raise awareness of personnel currently serving as well as those who have been involved in previous conflicts. What effect these efforts may have on improving public understanding and reducing possible public indifference is difficult to estimate, but exploration of the UK public's support and understanding of the Armed Forces will provide an indication of whether further efforts are needed.

UK Public Support for the Armed Forces

As discussed earlier, public support for the Armed Forces is intimately linked with public support for the missions on which they serve. Public endorsement of the contemporary campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan missions peaked during the early stages of invasion and fell significantly as the missions continued.[58] Since 2006, public support for military operations in Afghanistan has remained at around 30%-40%[59] and although 75% of the public believe removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq was the right thing to do, 69% do not believe that the war was worth the human and financial cost.[60] Despite opposition to the campaigns, the public appear to be overwhelmingly supportive of the military personnel serving on them, with more than 90% reporting they support members of the Armed Forces regardless of what they think about those missions.[61] Clearly, the public are able to separate their opinions regarding military operations from attitudes towards military personnel.

Previous data suggest that the public have a positive view of the UK Armed Forces (see table). There is a great deal of respect and admiration for the Armed Forces, who are continually reported as a national institution or icon that makes members of the public feel proud to be British.[62] Supportive attitudes towards the Armed Forces vary from 50-80% depending on the survey but are overwhelmingly positive. The public is also aware of the professionalism nature of the modern Armed Forces; 83% of the public in one survey report a great deal or a fair amount of respect for the Armed Forces because of their work in Afghanistan and on other study, 84% admire soldiers as a profession.[63]

Findings from the 2011 British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey confirm these findings, with 83% of the public saying they have a high or a very high opinion of the UK Armed Forces, and 75% reporting a great deal of respect.[64] This "general" public perception of the UK Armed Forces is likely to vary in relation to gender, age, social class, education and political affiliation; generally older people, conservatives and men tend to be more supportive of the Armed Forces and their missions.[65] Personal military experience and family connections to the military are likely to influence attitudes.[66] Although there are some differences across society, this study found that "most people, irrespective of age, educational qualifications or political affiliation – hold the military in high regard" and that these opinions are relatively stable over time.[67] Thus, the public's respect and high regard for the Armed Forces, suggests an overall positive view of the UK Armed Forces.

That the public are supportive of Armed Forces personnel regardless of opposition to the recent missions on which they have served indicates that the Armed Forces are perceived as people doing the job they are trained for[68] – and doing it well or with professional competence. The separation of the politics of a situation from those in it reflects a broader change in western military institutions, stemming from the increasing perception of Armed Forces personnel as individuals, defined by their personal and familial relationships and professionalism.[69] King argues that the emergence of the professional military in the 20th century, as epitomised by the all-volunteer force, has changed the social identity of the soldier and, therefore, how the public perceives members of the Armed Forces. Whereas conscripted forces drew on identities such as the politically motivated citizen soldier inspired by civic values and/or ethnic nationalism, as well as masculine norms, which made up for a lack of military experience, the contemporary military relies increasingly on the professionalism of troops to operate effectively. Personnel are recruited based on their ability to perform the job and pass objective performance standards with sexual orientation, gender, and ethnicity becoming less relevant. As a result, the public comes to understand military personnel as individuals in terms of their professional achievement, rather as a representation of, for example, national identity.[70]

Public support includes less overt signs of endorsement. Appreciation for the Armed Forces in the UK is commonly expressed through voluntary financial donations to Service charities[71] as displayed by the overwhelming level of donations to Help for Heroes in the wake of the murder of Lee Rigby.[72] Nearly two-thirds of the public are aware of a Service charity for ex-Service personnel and more than three-quarters had donated during the Poppy Appeal prior to the survey.[73] The two largest charities, Royal British Legion and Help for Heroes, both raised approximately £30 million in their last annual campaigns[74], and there are an estimated 2,000 Service charities operating in England and Wales alone.[75]

One issue with the success of charitable campaigns is their reliance on characterising Service personnel, and veterans in particular, as victims. Although extremely successful in increasing donations, this portrayal and its contrast with both military culture and how Service personnel regard themselves is a matter for concern. While the MoD appreciates donations to charitable organisations and provides information on how to donate to them[76], this perception may be contribute to the adoption of a sympathetic attitude towards the Armed Forces by the public, especially when fuelled by media articles depicting soldiers as not only heroes but as victims of war and government insensitivity.[77] This hero-victim dichotomy is a catch-22 for the Armed Forces; public sympathy towards the military can undermine morale and support for deployment on future missions, but may lead to an increase in overall support for the military during operations. Yet, this type of support may be the antithesis of what members of the Armed Forces want. As outlined succinctly by former commander of 3 Para Regiment, British Army, Colonel Stuart Tootal: "Soldiers don't want sympathy, they don't want pity, they just want support, and the last thing they want is for the British public to wobble on them now".[78]

Alongside the question of whether the portrayal of members of the Armed Forces by charity organisations helps perpetuated public misconceptions about Service veterans, are concerns about how much voluntary financial support can be expected of the public during an age of economic austerity in the UK. There is likely to be a limit to how much service provision the public feel willing to fund outside taxation and how much they feel the government should be responsible for given the service of military personnel in their name. The potential for public indifference to increase following the conclusion of major operations in Afghanistan and a reduction in the amount of news coverage of the military may affect public donations to charities, either through a decrease in public awareness of issues facing military personnel or a decline in willingness to donate to such charities.

Another measure of support for the Armed Forces, albeit one with a less immediate link to personnel, is public endorsement of government defence spending. Relative to other spending priorities, in particular health and education, there is limited support for increased defence expenditure despite high support for military personnel during the Iraq and Afghanistan missions. Even following public debates and news stories regarding a lack of resources for deployed personnel during the Afghanistan mission, public endorsement of defence spending did not change significantly, although it might be expected if it ensured personnel had what the public viewed as the appropriate level resources.[79] However, support for such measures may be meaningless when they occur in direct competition with other public sectors that are seen as more deserving. There also appears to be some tension in public attitudes regarding defence spending. When the public are asked about increasing defence spending in relation to budgetary cuts in other areas or following information on current levels of expenditure, there is little support for an increase. However, when asked in relation to the ability of the UK to defend itself, defence receives greater support (see table). With the current period of economic austerity likely to persist for the next decade, how this tension may play out politically, especially in comparison with protected areas such as health, as well as following UK withdrawal from Afghanistan, is a matter of interest.

Overall, the public appears to hold the UK Armed Forces in high regard, but opposition to recent missions might mean that public endorsement continues to come with an a more ambivalent element of sympathy or pity, although we cannot be certain of the extent of this. As a result of this, the stability of UK public support for the Armed Forces is far from certain. It is unknown whether this current situation, and the currently high levels of public support, will continue once the military withdraws from Afghanistan.

Understanding of the Armed Forces amongst the UK public

On the surface it appears that public understanding of the Armed Forces may be low, possibly an indication of a level of indifference. Opinion poll data suggest that the majority of the public do not feel confident in their understanding of the Armed Forces (see table). When asked about their knowledge of the Armed Forces, 41% of the public report knowing only a little or almost nothing about the military, and 62% report knowing not very much or very little about the daily military life.[80] Understanding of the work of the Armed Forces is also low. Many of the public believe their comprehension of the objectives of the Iraq and Afghanistan missions to be incomplete[81] and accurate estimation of the number of deaths during these operations is poor.[82] Taken together, these findings imply, at the very least, lack of attention to the information available on the work of the military and at the most, an absence of interest in what the military do. While it is difficult to pinpoint the reasons for this, it is possible that public indifference to the military may be arising from a decrease in contact[83], although public fatigue and confusion over the political complexities of recent missions should be considered as well. However, it is important to differentiate between understanding of the role of the military and understanding of recent missions. Doing so requires further in-depth analysis of public opinion.

In this regard, and given the lack of empirical evidence on public understanding of the UK Armed Forces, we can draw on the UK's imperial and post-imperial history to further investigate public understanding. The UK public is well accustomed to a military that is regularly deployed on expeditionary operations[84] – there has been only one year since 1945 when the Armed Forces were not on active duty or suffered an operational casualty.[85] The long-standing tradition of commemorating past conflicts in the UK[86], which continued during the recent Iraq and Afghanistan missions, along with the media coverage and parliamentary statements of fatalities and high-profile repatriation of casualties in Royal Wootton Bassett (now discontinued), are likely to have reinforced the sense of sacrifice inherent in military service in the collective mind of the UK public. These previous campaigns and practices may

have allowed the public to develop what we term an "intuitive" rather than a direct, experientially based understanding based on common assumptions about the military.

This intuitive understanding or awareness is unlikely to apply to all European states or in the same way, and comparison with other European states adds support to the idea of an intuitive understanding amongst the UK public. Nations with an imperial past similar to the UK, such as France, find it taking part in missions in order to retain part of their historical power more acceptable.[87] For the populations of countries without such histories, and where combat is less likely to be a major role of their military forces, understanding of the Armed Forces is likely to differ. For example, in Sweden, the public perceive their nation as peaceful and neutral, and as a result support for the military declines whenever they are deployed on non-humanitarian missions.[88] Similarly, Germany's avoidance of combat roles as a result of their involvement in the Second World War[89], has led to hesitation to refer to their participation in operations in Afghanistan as a "war" [90] and reluctance among both the public[91] and the government[92] to involve German military personnel in Libya in 2011. In the UK, the public may not agree with recent operations as seen during protests prior to the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. With evidence for strong public support for the Armed Forces despite this, as discussed earlier, this suggests a general understanding and acceptance of the combat role of the military among the UK public.

Reflecting on the matter of intuitive understanding, both in a UK and European context, allows us to consider some of the broader implications for civil-military relations. For this we can turn to King's recent discussion on the memorialising of casualties. The ways in which military deaths are presented to the public will contribute to their understanding, and King argues that in commemorating the deaths of their comrades in repatriation parades and remembrance services, military personnel stress the professionalism of those who have lost their lives and the personal significance of their deaths for their unit or regiment as well as grieving family members. This brings the focus on personnel to their individual role, and is in contrast with earlier in the 20th century, when such losses were contextualised in terms of the wider causes of Nation and patriotism. King is careful to note national variations here: 'Canada is very close to Britain and at the local level similar processes are observable in the US. In France and Germany the concept of the nation and the political context of the deaths are stressed much more'.[93] The idea that military personnel increasingly self-identify in terms of professionalism finds an echo in the perceptions of wider society. The British public not only support the troops rather than the war [in both Iraq and Afghanistan] but do so in ways that focus on the individuals and their families who have lost their lives or been injured in the wars. Consequently, the narrative presented is of Armed Forces personnel fulfilling a professional role, an understanding of which has developed among the public.

Given the lack of contact between the Armed Forces and the public, it seems likely that their understanding of their Armed Forces may have become intuitively drawn from the conceptions of the military role that have formed during previous conflicts, reinforced by the widespread presence of war memorials and processes of memorialising such as Poppy Day, as well as recent commemorations of a distinctly personal and familial kind epitomised in the repatriation of those killed in action via Royal Wootton Basset. This may not provide a strong understanding of military life or the Armed Forces, but can become a spur for political action. For example, the public have been drawing attention to the support systems mitigating family and personal losses arising from war. Military family policy, and duty of care issues have become politicised, and as previously discussed earlier in terms of the Armed Forces Covenant, the government is encouraged to commit to allocating scarce resources to these matters. There is now a legal precedent to do so; three key principles established by the Supreme Court ruling in June 2013 were that the MOD could be sued for negligence, Human Rights legislation was applicable within military and operational areas and the interpretation of the idea of combat immunity was narrowed. [94] Unsurprisingly, there are concerns in military and MOD circles that the ruling

will lead to a flood of litigation and have deleterious effect on training and equipment.[95] This increasingly legal and social context of contestation amongst Service personnel, their families, the wider public and the MOD may provide a framework in which public understanding and support of the Armed Forces, whether on operations or not, will evolve.

Conclusion

Our analysis suggests that the UK public have high regard for the UK Armed Forces but little support for the recent missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. The public also make a clear distinction between the politics of the mission and the individuals serving on it. Public understanding of the work of the Armed Forces and their recent missions is poor, possibly due to a lack of interest or fatigue regarding coverage of the Iraq and Afghanistan missions. Despite this the UK's long history of military deployments may have instilled the public with an intuitive understanding of the basic realities of military life compared to other European states. This form of understanding highlights a distinctive feature of UK civil-military relations, which appears to reflect a broader western social transformation.

A major military and political concern has been whether the civil-military gap might have widened into a gulf. While we see evidence of some divergences in attitudes between civil and military cultures we found no suggestion that a difference of this magnitude exists within the UK, but as the operational profile of the UK Armed Forces reduces following the withdrawal from Afghanistan at the end of 2014 current support and interest amongst the public might wane into indifference. Further public reflection about the heritage of the wars of 9/11, especially the costs relative to what has been achieved, might lead them to focus some of their doubts about the mission on to the military institution itself and the personnel that comprise it. In addition, as in previous eras, the different parts of the public are likely to think of Service and ex-Service personnel in terms of a shifting kaleidoscope of images: the hero, the victim and the villain. Such myths, including the idea that most Service personnel are damaged by their service, provide the context in which military and political concerns in the UK about the civil-military gap becoming a gulf are likely to re-surface.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Dr Eddie Guzdar for his help in the initial literature review.

References

Commented [k1]: Need to make sure all in AF&S style

[1] Dandeker, C. "From Victory to Success: The Changing Mission of Western Armed Forces." In *Modern Warfare and the Utility of Force*, edited by J. Angstrom and I. Duvesteyn. London: Routledge, 2010.

[2] Forster, A. "Breaking the Covenant: The Governance of the British Army in the Twenty-First Century." *International Affairs* 82, no. 6 (2006): 1043-57. The UK MOD has launched a major new PR campaign designed to influence public opinion and those who might be favourably disposed to join the Regular or Reserve forces. See 'New Army recruitment campaign hits screens' www.gov.uk/government/news/new-army-recruitment-campaign-hits-screens

[3] Park, A., E. Clery, J. Curtice, M. Phillips, and D. Utting. "British Social Attitudes: The 29th Report." London: NatCen Social Research, 2012.

[4] Data was gathered through reference searching and literature searches of abstracts published after January 2000 in databases such as Jstor and Armed Forces and Society using the search terms "UK Public" or "public" or "attitudes" or "support" or "understanding" combined with "Armed Forces" or "military" or "army" or "navy" or "air-force". Online databases of market research companies Angus Reid, YouGov, and ComRes were searched using "military", "Armed Forces" and "soldiers" as search terms.

[5] Dandeker, C. "Recruiting the All-Volunteer Force: Continuity and Change in the British Army, 1963-2008,." In *The New Citizen Armies: Israel's Armed Forces in Comparative Perspective*, edited by S. Cohen, 32-47: Routledge, 2009.

[6] Strachan, H. "The Civil-Military "Gap" in Britain." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 26, no. 2 (2003): 43-63.

[7] Tipping, C. "Understanding the Military Covenant." *RUSI Journal* 153, no. 3 (2008): 12-15.

[8] Rose, SO. "Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain." *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 4 (1998): 1147-76.

[9] Dandeker, C., and MW. Segal. "Gender Integration in Armed Forces: Recent Policy Developments in the United Kingdom." *Armed Forces & Society* 23, no. 1 (1996): 29-47.

[10] Ripsmana, NM., and JS. Levyb. "The Preventive War That Never Happened: Britain, France, and the Rise of Germany in the 1930s." *Security Studies* 16, no. 1 (2007): 32-67.

[11] Baynes, J. "Recruiting the Professional Army 1960-90." In *The British Army*, edited by H. Strachan, 2000.

[12] Smith, R. *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*. London: Allen Lane, 2005.

[13] Klein, P., and KW. Haltiner. "Multinationalty as a Challenge for Armed Forces." In *Military Missions and Their Implications Reconsidered: The Aftermath of September 11th (Contributions to Conflict Management, Peace Economics and Development*, edited by G. Caforio, Kümme, G.: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2005.

[14] Edmunds, T. "British Civil-Military Relations and the Problem of Risk." *International Affairs* 88, no. 2 (2012): 265-82.

[15] Dandeker, C. "New Times for the Military: Some Sociological Remarks on the Changing Role and Structure of the Armed Forces of the Advanced Societies." *The British Journal of Sociology* 45, no. 4 (1994): 637-54.

[16] Dandeker , "New Times for the Military: Some Sociological Observations on the Changing Role and Structure of the Armed Forces of the Advanced Societies".

[17] Forster, A. "Armed Forces and Societies: Changing Roles and Legitimacy." In *Armed Forces and Society in Europe*, edited by A. Forster. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

[18] Moskos, C. "Towards a Postmodern Military: The United States as a Paradigm." In *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces after the Cold War*, edited by C. Moskos, JA. Willaims and DR. Segal. New York: Oxford University Press 2000.

[19] Edmunds, "British Civil-Military Relations and the Problem of Risk."

[20] See cdn.yougov.com/today_uk_import/YG-Archives-Ira-sTimes-IraqAfghanistanBrownBush-070813.pdf and www.angus-reid.com/polls/39492/majorities_of_americans_and_britons_believe_the_war_in_iraq_was_a_mistake for examples

[21] Pew Research Center. "Widespread Middle East Fears That Syrian Violence Will Spread: No Love for Assad, yet No Support for Arming the Rebels." Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2013; YouGov. "Syria: Cameron, Hollande at Odds with Voters." YouGov, yougov.co.uk/news/2013/03/21/syria-cameron-hollande-odds-voters/; YouGov. "Majority Oppose UK Troops in Mali." YouGov, yougov.co.uk/news/2013/01/30/majority-oppose-uk-troops-mali.

[22] Feaver, PD., RH. Kohn, and LP. Cohn. "The Gap between Military and Civilian in the United States in Perspective." In *Soldiers and Civilians. The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security*, edited by PD. Feaver and RH. Kohn. Cambridge, Massachusetts, US: Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs, 2001.

[23] Feaver, Kohn, and Cohn, "The Gap between Military and Civilian in the United States in Perspective."

[24] Strachan, "The Civil-Military "Gap" in Britain."; Caforio, G. "The Cultural Gap between the Military and Its Parent Society in Italy." In *Military Missions and the Implications Reconsidered: The Aftermath of September 11th*, edited by G. Carforio and G. Kümmel, 127 - 49, 2005; Collmer, S. "The Cultural Gap between the Military and the Parent Society: The German Case." In *Military Missions and the Implications Reconsidered: The Aftermath Of September 11th*, edited by G. Carforio and G. Kümmel, 115 - 26, 2005; Weibull, A. "Is There a Cultural Gap in Civil-Military Relations in Sweden?". In *Military Missions and the Implications Reconsidered: The Aftermath of September 11th*, edited by G. Carforio and G. Kümmel, 249 - 63, 2005.

[25] Rahbek-Clemmensen, J., EM. Archer, J. Barr, A. Belkin, M. Guerrero, C. Hall, and KO. Swain. "Conceptualizing the Civil-Military Gap: A Research Note." *Armed Forces & Society* 38, no. 4 (2012): 669-78.

[26] Strachan, "The Civil-Military "Gap" in Britain."

[27] Forster, A. "The Military Covenant and British Civil–Military Relations: Letting the Genie out of the Bottle." *Armed Forces & Society* 38, no. 2 (2011): 273-90.

[28] Dandeker, C., and L. Freedman. "The British Armed Services." *The Political Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2002): 465-75.

[29] Forster, "Breaking the Covenant: The Governance of the British Army in the Twenty-First Century."; BBC News. "Women's Front-Line Role Reviewed." BBC News, news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8065604.stm.

[30] Boëne, B. "The Military as a Tribe among Tribes." In *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military*, edited by Giuseppe Caforio. Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research, 167-85: Springer US, 2006.

[31] Woodward, R., and P. Winter. "Discourses of Gender in the British Army." *Armed Forces and Society* 30, no. 2 (2004): 279-301. Mackowski, J. 2013. Women in Combat Roles: The Changing of the Guard. In, Jan 2013, RUSI Analysis, www.rusi.org/go.php?structureID=commentary&ref=C510684E1B53E8#.U249NIH5Qud. (accessed 9 May, 2014).

[32] This issue has been the subject of a House of Commons Defence Committee enquiry - see House of Commons Defence Committee. 2014. UK Armed Forces Personnel and the Legal Framework for Future Operations Twelfth Report of Session 2013–14. www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmdfence/931/931.pdf (accessed 9 May, 2014).

[33] Norton-Taylor, R. 2013. Supreme Court Mod Ruling 'Will Have Huge Impact on Military Operations'. In *The Guardian*, www.theguardian.com/law/2013/jun/19/supreme-court-mod-ruling-impact. (accessed 5 Jan, 2014).

[34] Dixon, P. "Britain's 'Vietnam Syndrome'? Public Opinion and British Military Intervention from Palestine to Yugoslavia." *Review of International Studies* no. 26 (1) (2000):99-121.

[35] Parris, M. "I Agree with Every Word That Dannatt Said. But He Has Got to Be Sacked." *The Times*, 2006; Ellner, A. "Civil-Military Relations under Strain - a Comparative Analysis of Britain and the Us." In *60th Anniversary Conference of the Political Studies Association and the British International Studies Association*. Edinburgh: Political Studies Association, 2010.

[36] BBC News. "Army Chief Warns of Social 'Gulf'." BBC News, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7006720.stm

[37] Dorman, A. "Britain and Its Armed Forces Today." *The Political Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (2007): 320-27.Dorman, "Britain and Its Armed Forces Today."

[38] Feaver, Kohn, and Cohn, "The Gap between Military and Civilian in the United States in Perspective."

[39] Forster, "The Military Covenant and British Civil–Military Relations: Letting the Genie out of the Bottle."

[40] Feaver, Kohn, and Cohn, "The Gap between Military and Civilian in the United States in Perspective."

[41] Irondelle, B. "Civil-Military Relations and the End of Conscription in France." *Security Studies* 12, no. 3 (2003): 157-18; Haltiner, KW., and TS. Tresch. *European Civil-Military Relations in Transition: The Decline of Conscription*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2008.

[42] Moskos, C., JA. Williams, and DR. Segal. *Armed Forces after the Cold War*. The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces after the Cold War. edited by C. Moskos, JA. Williams and DR. Segal New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

[43] British Army. "A British Soldiers Values and Standards." edited by British Army. London: Ministry of Defence, 2008.

[44] BBC News. "Protest in London Marks 10 Years of War in Afghanistan." BBC News, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15227798 www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15227798, BBC News. "Million March against the Iraq War." BBC News,, news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/2765041.stm

[45] Dorman, "Britain and Its Armed Forces Today."

[46] Ministry of Defence (2013) 'The armed forces covenant', www.gov.uk/the-armed-forces-covenant: Accessed: 9 May, 2013.

[47] Soldiering – The Military Covenant, Army Doctrine Publication, Volume 5, February 2000

[48] Ingham, S. (2014) *The Military Covenant: Its Impact on Civil–Military Relations in Britain*, London: Ashgate.

[49] See British Army. "Army Doctrine Publication: Operations." London: Ministry of Defence, 2010. McCartney, H. "The Military Covenant and the Civil-Military Contract in Britain." *International Affairs* 86 (2010): 411-28. and Taylor, C. "Armed Forces Covenant Briefing Paper Sn/Ia/5979." edited by House of Commons Library. London: House of Commons Library, 2011.

[50] Ministry of Defence. "The Armed Forces Covenant."

[51] Tipping, "Understanding the Military Covenant."

[52] Defense, Department of. "A New Social Compact: A Reciprocal Partnership between the Department of Defense, Service Members, and Families." edited by Department of Defense, 2002.

[53] Examples include news.sky.com/story/909298/wounded-soldiers-may-be-denied-care-mps-say, www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/campaigns/our_boys/1888723/Para-fury-as-rehab-centre-is-shut.html, www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/campaigns/our_boys/3137157/War-wounded-face-the-axe-from-Army.html

[54] The Royal British Legion. "Honour the Covenant Campaign." Royal British Legion, www.britishlegion.org.uk/campaigning/previous-campaigns.

[55] Tipping, "Understanding the Military Covenant."

[56] Strachan, H., Tanya, A., Healy, P., Smith, M. "Report of the Task Force on the Military Covenant." edited by Task Force on the Military Covenant, 2010.

[57] Ministry of Defence. "Armed Forces Community Covenant." Ministry of Defence,, www.gov.uk/armed-forces-community-covenant.

[58] Edmunds, "British Civil-Military Relations and the Problem of Risk."

[59] Miller, CA. "Endgame for the West in Afghanistan? Explaining the Decline in Support for the War in Afghanistan in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, France and Germany." Strategic Studies Institute, 2010.

[60] Angus Reid Public Opinion. 2011. Americans, Britons Think Removing Saddam Was the Right Course of Action. In, Angus Reid Public Opinion, www.angus-reid.com/polls/44131/americans-britons-think-removing-saddam-was-right-course-of-action. (accessed 9 May, 2014).

[61] Gribble et al., "The UK Armed Forces: Public Support for the Troops but Not for the Missions?."

[62] Ipsos Mori. 2012. Britons Are More Proud of Their History, Nhs and Army Than the Royal Family. In, Ipsos Mori, www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2939/Britons-are-more-proud-of-their-history-NHS-and-army-than-the-Royal-Family.aspx. (accessed 25 April, 2013).

[63] YouGov. 2013. Yougov Cambridge Survey Results. In, http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/ghtr5u6c01/YGCam-Archive-results-100113-Attitudes-to-Afghanistan.pdf. (accessed 8 May, 2014). Ministry of Defence. 2013. Mod and Armed Forces Reputation Survey Spring 2013: Topline Findings In, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/230255/MOD_external_opinion_survey_Spring_2013_top_lines.pdf. (accessed 8 May, 2014).

[64] Gribble et al. "The U.K. Armed Forces: Public Support for the Troops but Not Their Missions?", p. 141

[65] For examples, see: Gonzalez, AH. "Spanish Attitudes Towards Multinational Defense ". In *Future Roles, Missions and Structures of Armed Forces in the New World Order: The Public View*, edited by P Manigart, 103-16. Commack, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1996; Eichenberg, RC. "Gender Differences in Public Attitudes toward the Use of Force by the United States,1990-2003." *International Security* 28, no. 1 (2003): 110-41; Holsti, OR. . "Sources of Foreign Policy Attitudes." In *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*, 163-239: University of Michigan Press, 2004; Leal, D. "American Public Opinion toward the Military: Differences by Race, Gender, and Class?". *Armed Forces & Society* 32, no. 1 (2005): 123-38; Clements, B. ""Hawks" and "Doves": Public Opinion in Britain Towards Overseas Military Interventions." *Political Insight* 2, no. 3 (2011): 12-15; Scotto, TJ., J. Reifler, HD. Clarke, JA. Diaz Lopez, D. Saunders, M. Stewart, and P. Whiteley. "Attitudes Towards British Involvement in Afghanistan - Briefing Paper (03/11) ": Institute for Democracy & Conflict Resolution, University of Essex Knowledge Gateway 2011.

[66] Krueger, JS., and FI. Pedraza. "Missing Voices: War Attitudes among Military Service-Connected Civilians." *Armed Forces & Society* 38, no. 3 (December 19, 2011 2011): 391-412.

[67] Ibid: 143

[68] Burk, J. "Theories of Democratic Civil-Military Relations." *Armed Forces & Society* 29, no. 7 (2002): 7-29; Forster, "Breaking the Covenant: The Governance of the British Army in the Twenty-First Century."

[69] King, A. "The Afghan War and 'Postmodern' Memory: Commemoration and the Dead of Helmand." *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (2010): 1-25.

[70] Anthony,A.. The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries, Oxford University Press, 2013.

[71] Strachan, H. "British Society and Armed Forces Day." Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4A42142744AA5/#.UZYMYqK7K6U.

[72] The Guardian. *Help for Heroes donations deluge crashes website after Woolwich murder* (24 May 2013). The Guardian 2013. Available from www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/may/24/help-the-heroes-website-crash-woolwich-murder.; Sky News. 2014. *Woolwich: Help For Heroes Raises £100,000* (25 May) 2013 [cited 03 April 2014]. Available from news.sky.com/story/1095455/woolwich-help-for-heroes-raises-100000.

[73] Gribble, R., S. Wessely, S. Klein, DA. Alexander, C. Dandeker, and N.T. Fear. "Public Awareness of Uk Veterans' Charities." *The RUSI Journal* 159, no. 1 (2014): 50-57.

[74] The 2012 Poppy Appeal campaign raised £35 million (www.britishlegion.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/poppy-appeal), accessed 19 Jan 2014. The 2012 Help for Heroes Annual report states that the organisation raised £32.6 million through voluntary donations in 2011/12 (www.helpforheroes.org.uk/Publications/Annual-Reports/2012), accessed 19 January 2014).

[75] Welsh Affairs Committee Briefing. 2014. *Support for Armed Forces Veterans: Briefing for Welsh Affairs Select Committee – Charity Commission*. UK Parliament 2012 [cited 02 April 2014]. Available from www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmwelaf/writev/veterans/vet19.htm.

[76] See 'Make a donation to support members of the armed forces' (www.gov.uk/donations-to-support-members-of-the-armed-forces)

[77] McCartney, H. "The Military Covenant and the Civil-Military Contract in Britain."

[78] Evening Standard. 2009. "Extra Helicopters Are 'Old and Knackered' Says Former Army Commander'." *Evening Standard*, 10 September.

[79] Gribble, R., Wessely, S., Klein, S., Alexander, D., Dandeker, C. and Fear, N. (2012) 'The UK Armed Forces: Public Support for the Troops but not for the Missions?', in A. Park, E. Clery, J. Curtice, M. Phillips and D. Utting (eds) *British Social Attitudes: the 29th Report*, London: NatCen Social Research.

[80] Ashcroft, " The Armed Forces & Society: The Military in Britain - through the Eyes of Service Personnel, Employers and the Public."

[81] Angus Reid Public Opinion. "Most Britons Continue to Regret Sending Soldiers to Afghanistan." Angus Reid Public Opinion, www.angus-reid.com/polls/43678/most-britons-continue-to-regret-sending-soldiers-to-afghanistan.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Burk, "Theories of Democratic Civil-Military Relations."

[84] Dixon, "Britain's 'Vietnam Syndrome'? Public Opinion and British Military Intervention from Palestine to Yugoslavia."; Dorman, "Britain and Its Armed Forces Today."

[85] Forster, "Armed Forces and Societies: Changing Roles and Legitimacy." Since the Restoration of the Monarch in 1660, the British Armed forces have only had one year in which they have not experienced a casualty – 1968.

[86] Winter, J. *Sites of Memorial, Sites of Mourning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; King, "The Afghan War and 'Postmodern' Memory: Commemoration and the Dead of Helmand."

[87] Dandeker, C. "New Times for the Military: Some Sociological Remarks on the Changing Role and Structure of the Armed Forces of the Advanced Societies." Ibid.45, no. 4 (1994): 637-54.

[88] Ydén, K., and J. Berndtsson. "The Arrival of War: The Swedes and the New Defence Policy (*När Kriget Kommit - Svenskarna Och Den Nya Försvarspolitiken*)." In *I Framtidens Skugga*, edited by L. Weibull, O. Henrik and A. Bergström: SOM-institutet, Göteborgs universitet, 2012.

[89] Von Bredow, W. "Germany in Afghanistan: The Pitfalls of Peace-Building in National and International Perspective." *Res Militaris* 2, no. 1 (2011).

[90] Ibid.

[91] Schmitt, O. "Strategic Users of Culture: German Decisions for Military Action." *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 1 (2012).

[92] Jones, BD. "Libya and the Responsibilities of Power." *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 53, no. 3 (2011): 51-60.

[93] King, A. "The Afghan War and 'Postmodern' Memory. Also see conference paper and subsequent debate at wileyblackwellwar.wordpress.com/2011/11/18/conference-paper-the-afghan-war-and-postmodern-memory-commemoration-and-the-dead-of-helmand

[94] Bowcott, O. (2013) 'Soldiers' families can sue Ministry of Defence, Supreme court rules', The Guardian, 19 June. www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/19/iraq-soldiers-families-sue-ministry-of-defence: Accessed 8 May 2014., Dominiczak, P. (2013) 'Defence chiefs: War no time to worry about rights laws', The Telegraph,, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/10391270/Defence-chiefs-War-no-time-to-worry-about-rights-laws.html: Accessed 2 April 2014., Wyatt, C. (2013) 'Legal claims 'could paralyse' armed forces', BBC News, 18 October. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24576547: Accessed 8 May 2014.

[95] Norton-Taylor, R. 2013. Supreme Court Mod Ruling 'Will Have Huge Impact on Military Operations'. In *The Guardian*, www.theguardian.com/law/2013/jun/19/supreme-court-mod-ruling-impact. (accessed 5 Jan, 2014).