

---

# Assessing the Effectiveness of Defence Diplomacy<sup>1</sup>

Andrew J. Corcoran

PCS Department,  
Defence Science and Technology Laboratories (Dstl)  
Farnborough, Hampshire  
England, United Kingdom.  
e-mail: ajcorcoran@dstl.gov.uk

*Andy J. Corcoran holds a Masters Degree in Strategic Studies from the University of Aberdeen, and currently works as an analyst with the Defence Science and Technology Laboratories (Dstl), part of the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD). He is project manager for the Dstl Defence Diplomacy Study, which is tasked to provide research and analysis to support the formulation of policy for UK Defence Relations.*

## INTRODUCTION

In 1998, the UK Strategic Defence Review (SDR) acknowledged conflict prevention and peacetime diplomacy as being core defence activities. In recognition of this, a new Defence Diplomacy Mission was created to give greater priority, impetus and coherence to these types of activities, as well as to ensure alignment with the Government's foreign and security policy objectives. Correspondingly, the Defence Diplomacy Mission was established:

*"To provide forces to meet the varied activities undertaken by the MoD to dispel hostility, build and maintain trust and assist in the development of democratically accountable armed forces, thereby making a significant contribution to conflict prevention and resolution."*<sup>2</sup>

Following the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 and the onset of the war on terrorism, this message was reiterated in the SDR 'New Chapter' published in July 2002. This document went on to say:

*"...In future, in determining our relative priorities in defence relations with other countries, we will want to give higher priority than hitherto to the potential demands of operations to counter terrorism, and the potential for particular countries to be partners, and to provide support."*<sup>3</sup>

During the New Chapter reappraisal of defence policy it became clear that there was no shared understanding of how the range of activities fitted together to deliver the Defence

---

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, common and proper nouns are used to distinguish between, respectively: on the one hand, references to *defence diplomacy* as a whole class of activity; and on the other, references to *Defence Diplomacy* as the formal name of a thing, e.g. the 'Defence Diplomacy Mission' or the 'Dstl Defence Diplomacy Study'. The same custom is applied to uses of *defence relations* and *Defence Relations*.

<sup>2</sup> *Defence Diplomacy*, MoD Policy Paper No1, dated 2001, page 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter*, dated July 2002, page 11.

Diplomacy Mission. It was also apparent that, at best, only an intuitive understanding existed of which activities are key enablers for the effects sought and how their influence varies with the region of interest. In view of this and in order to help assess the effectiveness of defence diplomacy activities more objectively and transparently, the Directorate of Policy Planning in MoD commissioned Dstl to examine the area from an analytical perspective.

The Dstl Defence Diplomacy Study is being conducted within the context set by the 1999 “Modernising Government” White Paper, which promotes an evidence-based approach to policy-making across Government. Another key report<sup>4</sup> includes the need for supporting evidence among the key features of modern policy formulation. This is based on the recognition that:

*“Good quality policy-making depends on high quality information and evidence. Modern policy-making calls for the need to improve Departments’ capacity to make best use of evidence, and the need to improve the accessibility of the evidence available to policy-makers.”*<sup>5</sup>

Defence diplomacy has been described as “disarmament of the mind”.<sup>6</sup> This phrase is intended to express the idea that defence diplomacy represents an opportunity to influence the intent and thereby the behaviour of other states in the period prior to their emergence as a security concern, or else whilst an adversarial relationship is still in its nascent stage. More concretely, defence diplomacy comprises the range of non-operational activities that support the MoD contribution to the UK Government’s effort in the field of conflict prevention and resolution. The categories of activity (the *functional components*<sup>7</sup> of defence diplomacy) considered by the research reported on in this paper are:

- a. UK military education placements;
- b. Military training (UK or in-country);
- c. High-level visits (to / from UK);
- d. Personnel attachments and exchanges;
- e. Combined military exercises (overseas);
- f. Deployed training teams;
- g. International seminars, academic conferences, etc.

The scope of the study that is reported on in this paper extends only to these MoD activities.<sup>8</sup> It does not include the significant contributions made by other UK Government

---

<sup>4</sup> See *Professional Policy Making for the Twenty-First Century*, Cabinet Office dated 1999.

<sup>5</sup> *Better Policy-Making*, Cabinet Office (Centre for Management and Policy Studies) dated 2001, page 25.

<sup>6</sup> *Defence Diplomacy*, MoD Policy Paper No1, dated 2001, page 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Evaluating Defence Diplomacy*, Anthony Forster and Michael Clarke (King’s College London), dated June 2001, page 5.

<sup>8</sup> The *geographic* scope of the study was limited to a set of twelve countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The rationale for this parameter was that, because this region had received substantial and sustained defence

Departments such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DfID), each of which has a broad remit in the field of conflict prevention and resolution. Nor does it take into account the activities of other nations operating in this field. The USA, for example, invests in the Army International Activities programme, which has roughly equivalent purpose and objectives to UK defence diplomacy. Various intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) also contribute significantly. For instance, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has, arguably, influenced the character of the post-Cold War security landscape in Central and Eastern Europe. Undoubtedly, many such factors could exert a potentially significant influence upon countries' macro-level behaviour. The technical cost of not accommodating such factors in the analysis reported here is commented upon later.

The purpose of this paper is to sketch the rationale, approach, and insights gleaned from the first year of research on the Dstl Defence Diplomacy Study. It proceeds by building on the rationale for study using a sample of the anecdotal evidence that testifies to the apparent effectiveness of defence diplomacy. Second, it elucidates the quantitative approach adopted and outlines the findings generated. Finally, it comments on the challenges encountered, before drawing conclusions on the way forward for this study in the light of lessons learned.

### SOME ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE

The SDR 'New Chapter' reported that "there was a lot of support for more defence diplomacy in treating the causes [of security concerns], because of its perceived large area of engagement, high degree of influence and low cost."<sup>9</sup> A cursory survey of the anecdotal evidence associated with three particular defence diplomacy activities indicates why this is widely held to be the case.

First, Defence Advisers are senior UK Civil Servants who are embedded for extended periods in partners' defence ministries, with a remit to advise on policy formulation in relation to issues such as the reform of defence management practices. Most notably, in Central and Eastern Europe, there is evidence to indicate that Defence Advisers have played an important role in modernising states' post-Cold War approach to security sector reform. This is exemplified in the role they have played in catalysing a departure from the outmoded models of defence management and security sector practice associated with the legacy of Soviet regional hegemony. Defence Advisers have held posts working as special advisors to senior defence staff up to ministerial level. In such circumstances, it is reasonable to assume that the advice provided has the potential to feed directly into the apex of foreign decision-making. These observations testify to the level of access and influence available to the UK MoD through its provision of Defence Advisers. On this basis, it can be argued that Defence Advisers are to be regarded as small but effective cogs in the much larger politico-military mechanism that has been instrumental in steering the governments of Central and Eastern Europe away from defence arrangements based on central command economies; instead facilitating their adoption of practices that reflect the norms and values of the Western democracies.

---

diplomacy investment throughout the 1990s, it was judged that it afforded the greatest hope of maximal returns from the analysis undertaken.

<sup>9</sup> *Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter (Supporting Information and Analysis)*, dated July 2002, page 19.

Second, British Army Training Teams have operated for decades with a global reach. However, during the mid-1990s, the BMATT (British Military Advisory and Training Team) was established in Vyskov, Czech Republic, as a standing arrangement with the Czech Government. Since then, the BMATT has provided instruction on a ‘train the trainer’ basis to several Central and Eastern European countries. Its aim is to disseminate UK military standards and values, for example, in respect for human rights and the proportionate use of force in the operational context. Anecdotally, there is evidence of a diffusion of UK military ethos both horizontally across the region, and vertically through the force-structure in particular countries, some of which do not have established track records in the ‘Western’ approach to the application of force. Beyond Europe, in Oman, there has been a regular training team presence since the 1960s. In modern Oman, there is evidence of the ‘anglicisation’ of Omani military culture such that its armed forces exhibit similar standards and values to those adhered to as part of UK military ethos; this in stark contrast to many other militaries in the same region.

Third, a variety of UK defence education and training course placements are made available to foreign defence professionals. For example, young officers from a wide range of countries attend world-renowned initial officer training (IOT) courses at the Britannia Royal Naval College, the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, and the Royal Air Force College at Cranwell. The aim, again, is to promote UK best military practice and ethos, with the attendant standards and values. The Advanced Command and Staff Course (ACSC) performs a similar function in relation to middle-ranking officers.

Whilst IOT and the ACSC engage foreign military personnel at the outset and midpoint of their careers respectively, the Royal College of Defence Studies (RCDS) attracts foreign defence professionals who are likely to assume positions of high politico-military responsibility in their home countries. RCDS ‘Members’ spend a year based in London studying defence and broader geopolitical issues amid a stimulating academic environment. It is intended that the experience will equip Members with an enhanced understanding of the international environment within which they may soon operate at politico-militarily-significant levels. On a recent visit to London, RCDS alumnus President Musharraf of Pakistan commented that it was at the College that he had learned to make some of the difficult decisions that have been necessary for his country in the post-September 11 security environment.

These and other anecdotes testify to the apparent effectiveness of defence diplomacy. However, this standard of evidence is indictable on the grounds that, by its nature, it is essentially selective and therefore not impartial. Where it is employed to support a case for resource (re-) allocation, such evidence can be argued to amount to ‘cherry-picking’; that is, highlighting favourable instances and disregarding unhelpful ones. For example, citing anecdotal testimony relating to the case of Oman, British military training teams were earlier commended as a proven tool of defence diplomacy. However, training teams have also operated in Zimbabwe over a substantial timeframe (1980-2001).

Clearly, then, given the prevailing socio-political trend in Zimbabwe, UK training teams are not to be thought of as a pre-emptive panacea for the potential excesses of non-Western militaries. In this way, a general rationale is established for a more objective, rigorous and auditable approach to assessments of defence diplomacy such that these can reliably inform policy decisions. The analysis that is outlined below represents an attempt to address this requirement for a ‘scientific’ approach to evaluations in this area.

## QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The broad aim of the quantitative analysis was to establish statistically significant correlation between the ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’ of defence diplomacy. Low-level measures of performance (MoPs) were used to quantify the raw effort of defence diplomacy. For example, *inter alia*, data was collated on the number of foreign defence personnel attending UK training and education courses; the number of high-level politico-military engagements with states, inbound and outbound; the number of ship visits to countries; and the size and frequency of combined exercises with other states’ militaries.

Meanwhile, relatively high-level Measures of Effectiveness (MoEs) were developed to assess relevant aspects of engaged countries’ behaviour. These MoEs sought to reflect not only the three components of the Defence Diplomacy Mission – *to dispel hostility, build and maintain trust, and promote the development of democratically accountable armed forces* – but also to reflect the UK inter-Departmental targets jointly agreed upon by MoD, FCO and DfID. These are:

1. Strengthen international and regional systems, and capacity for conflict prevention, early warning, crisis management, conflict resolution / peace making, peace keeping and peace building.
2. Contribute to global and regional conflict prevention initiatives, such as curbing the proliferation of small arms and the diversion of resources to finance conflicts.
3. Promote initiatives in selected countries, including indigenous capacity building, to help avert conflict, reduce violence and build sustainable security and peace.

To these ends, MoEs were achieved by gathering quantitative data from internationally recognised sources (such as the Stockholm International Peace Reporting Institute (SIPRI) and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)), for example, on countries’ contribution of manpower to UN peacekeeping missions. Other MoEs sought to address relevant aspects of country behaviour in broader terms. Thus, published indices of political and economic freedom, and government corruption were used in an attempt to detect broad trends relating to the quality of indigenous governance. Finally, a tailored questionnaire was developed to elicit informed opinion across a range of MoD desk officers as to relevant aspects of countries’ behaviour over the timeframe considered.<sup>10</sup>

Having collated the requisite data to support MoPs and MoEs, statistical techniques were employed to identify *correlation* between the levels of defence diplomacy functional components and the levels of the chosen output measures. Although this technique cannot *prove* cause and effect it can increase the confidence underpinning policy decisions, as well as identifying possible causal linkages for further investigation. However, owing to factors which are discussed below (e.g. the limited amount of available data), disappointingly few

---

<sup>10</sup> The original intention was to conduct analysis for the decade 1991-2001. However, it was found that the available data would not support this aspiration, and the timeframe considered was by necessity contracted to the half-decade period from 1996-2001. Despite this measure, data availability persisted as a confounding practical issue; see main body.

correlations were found that had statistical significance. The remainder of this section comments on the content and interpretation of the limited correlation that was detected.

Participation in combined exercises was positively correlated with a reduction in hostility towards neighbours in the same year. There was also a strong positive correlation between the number of high-level visits to and from partner states, and the level of contribution by those states to UN peacekeeping missions in the same year.<sup>11</sup> However, due to a lack of resolution in the raw data used to support the analysis that generated this correlation, the chronology of the military exercises and high-level visits in relation to their apparent outputs could not be determined. This reduced the level of confidence with which it was possible to assert causal links between these functional components and countries' observed behaviour based on the analysis. After all, of course, it could be that the functional components post-dated the effects they might be purported to have generated.

In other instances, the direction of causation, assuming any, was clear and favourable.<sup>12</sup> For example, for certain countries engaged in defence diplomacy, the number of UK education placements was positively correlated with both non-hostility towards domestic opponents in those countries, and their level of contribution to conflict prevention and resolution, *two years later*.<sup>13</sup> Other correlation established statistically significant links between both high-level visits and the provision of English language training, and a particular country's contribution to UN peacekeeping missions in subsequent years.<sup>14</sup> Although such conclusions are to be regarded somewhat tentatively in view of the limitations in the available data set, it is worthwhile noting that there are potentially significant implications for the relationship between defence diplomacy and international burden-sharing were these conclusions to be borne out in subsequent analysis.

## CHALLENGES FOR THE QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

The attempt to demonstrate a connection between the micro level inputs (functional components) of defence diplomacy and macro-level state behaviour proved too ambitious. Whilst the weight of anecdotal evidence suggests that defence diplomacy can achieve high influence at low cost, the quantitative approach adopted in the first year of our study was unable, with any notable success, to establish this statistically. It seems reasonable to postulate that two reasons jointly account for this shortcoming: the first pragmatic, and the second analytic.

The pragmatic constraint consisted in the lack of requisite data to support the analysis attempted. Before its inauguration as a formal Defence Mission in the 1998 SDR, defence diplomacy existed as a diverse range of activities under disparate custodians spread across MoD. Since 1998, there has been little movement toward the consolidation of a comprehensive central database for defence diplomacy activities. Consequently, collating the

---

<sup>11</sup> These observations are based on correlation involving both qualitative data from questionnaire responses and quantitative data drawn from SIPRI figures.

<sup>12</sup> Analysis of the relationship between the functional components and objectives of defence diplomacy took into account the likelihood that the tangible benefits of investment will sometimes only be manifested in the medium-to-long-term. Specifically, time lags were introduced into the analysis to allow for this contingency.

<sup>13</sup> Both observations are based on correlation involving questionnaire responses.

<sup>14</sup> Both observations are based on correlation involving quantitative data drawn from IISS and SIPRI figures.

requisite data to support this analysis involved trawling archival and other fragmented sources. It was discovered that data gathered in this way was expensive to collect and often incomplete. In fact, it is estimated that some 25% of the data required for the MoPs were irretrievable. The data used for the MoEs was generally more available although, as is typical with questionnaire methods, the overall utility of data derived in this way was adversely impacted by a low rate of return. As noted previously, due to gaps in available data, the statistical strength of any correlation between the functional components and the output measures - not to mention the likelihood of detecting such correlation *in the first place* - was significantly reduced.

The analytical challenge was more profound and consisted in the degree of accuracy with which it was possible to represent the complexity of the system under study. The fidelity of the relationship between functional components and states' behaviour was dampened for a number of possible reasons. In part, this dampening may have been because the time lag between activity and effect is too great to be detected in this analysis<sup>15</sup> or, more likely, that the activities of other parties swamped the MoD input.

It is an indisputable fact of international relations that state behaviour is influenced by a vast plethora of factors operating at systemic, unit and sub-unit levels. The work reported on in this paper sought, essentially, to establish the influence of a single factor (UK defence diplomacy) among many. Thus, due in part to the influence of non-defence diplomacy factors on the macro-level behaviour of engaged states, it is unsurprising that the implicit study hypothesis – *viz. that defence diplomacy generates favourable behaviour by engaged states* - was largely unsupported by the analysis undertaken. As alluded to at the beginning of this paper, it would be reasonable to assume that the activities of other UK Government Departments, other nations and IGOs will also impact significantly on the system of interest and therefore must be taken into account. However, in the cases mentioned, it would also be reasonable to assume that the direction of influence, assuming any, would be broadly convergent with that aimed at by UK MoD. Thus, part of the analytical challenge is, in the case of apparent success stories, to separate out the contribution of UK defence diplomacy from other factors. Rhetorically, to what degree were the first two waves of NATO enlargement attributable to concerted UK defence diplomacy engagement of Central and Eastern European countries over the post-Cold War decade; and to what extent was the same phenomenon due to the desire of these states for greater integration with the Euro-Atlantic economic and security institutional architecture? Would NATO enlargement have happened anyway; that is, without the contribution of UK MoD?

Other factors, meanwhile, can be expected to *conflict with* the intended effect of defence diplomacy effort, and in many cases these factors will be more potent (than defence diplomacy) in their capacity to influence a state's behaviour. Global trends and other international factors (e.g. states' traditional pursuit of geo-strategic interests) will play a significant role. Contrast what was stated in the preceding paragraph in relation to apparent successes in Central and Eastern Europe, with the more ambitious engagement of states in the Caucuses and Central Asia that fall within the traditional Russian sphere influence. Equally, the prevailing domestic political climate of a state will affect the degree to which it is amenable to effective defence diplomacy engagement. The topical example of Zimbabwe is

---

<sup>15</sup> Though it is to be noted that some success in the detection of time-lagged effects was reported earlier. The remedy to this challenge may be largely pragmatic in that, as earlier defence diplomacy investment recedes year-by-year into the past, it should become increasingly possible to detect medium- and long-term lagged effects and, in principle at least, to determine the longevity of these effects.

illustrative in this respect. The social-political trends associated with President Mugabe's policy of land reform clearly overwhelms any potential benefit generated by defence diplomacy investment there (British military training teams ceased assistance to Zimbabwe in 2001, breaking with a decades-long presence in the country).

Therefore, analysis that purports to have accurately represented the relationship between defence diplomacy and its intended effects must have first confronted the challenge of concomitantly representing the influence of 'rest-of-the-world' factors. Traditionally, in scientific experimentation, these are referred to as *extraneous variables*.<sup>16</sup> In the case of the analysis reported on in this paper, it is almost certainly the case that these extraneous variables, in conjunction with the significant data limitations highlighted, served to obscure the relationship that the analysis was designed to reveal. Future investigations in this area should heed this insight and endeavour to somehow allow for the impact of extraneous variables. To the extent that this is not possible, analysis along the lines described here should be regarded as untenable by dint of the overwhelming complexity of the system under study.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is likely that the MoEs selected by this study were pitched at too high a level to exclude the confounding impact of extraneous variables and, therefore, to detect any contribution made by defence diplomacy effort to the relevant aspects of engaged states' behaviour. It could also be argued, of course, that the lack of correlation supports the view that defence diplomacy was simply ineffective; however, the weight of anecdotal evidence militates against this interpretation. It is, therefore, tentatively concluded that a similar experimental design using lower level MoEs might be more fruitful in terms of establishing a statistical link between defence diplomacy investment and its intended effects.

It would, of course, remain to establish the extent of the linkage between these lower (or *intermediate*) level MoEs and the higher (or *macro*) level MoEs that reflect the types of state behaviour which, ultimately, defence diplomacy seeks to generate. The establishment of this link would entail 'grasping the nettle' already discussed; namely, of accounting for the impact of extraneous variables in a complex multivariate system.

Drawing upon the experience of the work described here, current research is focused on the development of MoEs against a set of specific objectives associated with UK Defence Relations Strategy, the emergence of which post-dates the analysis reported on here. Many of these objectives are pitched at an intermediate level when compared to the objectives already considered. The corollary of this is that, by the rationale outlined in the previous section, intermediate MoEs are likely to be more amenable to correlation with low level MoPs for defence relations engagement.

Therefore, once complete, present work could be harnessed to underpin a potentially more successful attempt to establish statistically significant linkage between defence relations

---

<sup>16</sup> *Extraneous variable* is a general term referring to any variable other than the *independent variable* (for present purposes, the functional components of defence diplomacy) which might have an effect on the measured *dependent variable* (the high-level objectives of defence diplomacy investment).

investment and its intended effects; subject to the extant caveat regarding the availability of suitable data to sustain such work. Such analyses could inform policy-formulation for defence relations, adding value by injecting rigour into future investment decisions through the provision of objective evidence, thereby superseding the extant tendency for reliance on testimony associated with anecdote and other modes of received wisdom.