



Ministry  
of Defence

# The Good Operation

A handbook for those involved in  
operational policy and its  
implementation





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# Introduction

‘The Good Operation’ handbook is designed to prompt its readers to ask the right questions as they plan for and execute a military operation, drawing in particular on the lessons of the 2016 Iraq Inquiry (Chilcot) Report, but also on other reports and on the experience of colleagues. While some elements of the handbook may appear self-evident, sometimes it’s important to restate the obvious. Though aimed primarily at MOD decision-makers, it is intended to have utility across the wider national security community.

This is not intended to be a step-by-step guide, to be followed slavishly in all circumstances, but rather an outline of a general thought process. It is not military doctrine, though it complements it. It seeks to help with operations in all three environments, maritime, land and air, as well as domains such as cyber and space; whether ‘kinetic’ or ‘non-kinetic’; and whether relatively straightforward or complex, demanding and politically difficult. It aligns with military values and the Civil Service Code.

Read it when you take up post; reach for it when you find yourself in the midst of operational planning or the operation itself. Above all, learn not only that attention to detail is essential to the ‘good operation’, but also that it is not sufficient – you need also to set aside excessive self-confidence, bring critical thinking to bear at all times and challenge where you think things are going wrong.

In other words, the ‘good operation’ is not just about having the best possible policy, strategy and force to deploy, but also about what you do as an official within Government, and the accountability you bear for your actions.

## **The Chilcot Team**

January 2018

**The Report of the Iraq Inquiry**  
**Volume I**

Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors

- **The Iraq Inquiry (Chilcot) Report was published on 6 July 2016. The Report was comprehensive, comprising 2.6 million words spread over 13 volumes, and covered the period 2001-2009.**

- **Sir John Chilcot, as Chair of the Inquiry, concluded that:**

- The UK military role in Iraq ended a very long way from success.
- The Government failed to achieve its stated objectives.

- **In headline terms, the Report suggests that Government:**

- Had a propensity for '**groupthink**' – when a group of people conform in their thinking to the extent that their decision-making has an irrational or dysfunctional outcome – reflecting insufficient challenge and a lack of diversity of thought.
- Didn't properly **understand** the situation it was getting involved in.

- Didn't exercise sufficient **foresight** about the way in which events would develop, particularly in planning for the post-warfighting phase of the operation.
- Suffered from multiple impediments to effective **decision-making**: structures and processes impeded the flow of information and evidence; strategy-making was weak and inflexible; and insufficient attention was paid to the capability required for the operation and to determining the resources required to ensure success.

- **The Report also suggests that:**

- The UK failed to **negotiate** a satisfactory place in the coalition, at all levels.
- The MOD – primarily for cultural reasons – struggled to **collaborate and co-operate** across Government (Partners Across Government were not immune to this, but it was particularly pronounced in MOD).
- Our **strategic communications** failed internationally, domestically and in-theatre.



- There was no clear MOD lead in resolving the tension between near-term and longer-term **equipment requirements**.
- Governments have a responsibility to make every effort to understand the effects of their military action on **civilian populations**.
- **In light of these findings, we concluded that we had to do much better. As a starting point, Partners Across Government developed a simple ‘Chilcot Checklist’ to provide a rule-of-thumb guide to aid decision-making during both planning and implementation; this appears on the next page and provides the structure for the rest of this handbook.**



## The Chilcot Checklist

- 1 VISION: WHY DO WE CARE?**  
What does this mean for British interests? What are the risks of acting or doing nothing, including in the longer term? What is different now?
- 2 ANALYSIS: WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW?**  
What are your sources of ground truth/evidence? Have assumptions been exposed to analytical tools or external challenge?
- 3 SCENARIOS: WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN NEXT?**  
Have you looked at a range of options, and scenarios and consequences that could flow from these?
- 4 OPTIONS: WHAT SHOULD WE DO?**  
Have you designed your options collaboratively, built in challenge and presented Ministers with clear information on risks, opportunities and costs?
- 5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS: HOW DO WE ENSURE ACTION IS LAWFUL?**  
What is the wider legal context? Are Ministers aware of any legal risks? What are the policy implications? How will you ensure that any international legal basis remains sound if circumstances change?
- 6 POLICY AND STRATEGY: WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?**  
Does a clear strategy, and a feasible course of action that will meet policy objectives, exist? Is the approach supported by analysis?
- 7 RESOURCE: WHAT DO WE NEED TO DELIVER?**  
What are the resource implications of your options?
- 8 PLANNING AND DOING: HOW SHOULD WE DO IT?**  
Have you planned for a range of possible contingencies? Who is accountable and responsible for what?
- 9 POLICY PERFORMANCE: HOW WILL YOU MONITOR PERFORMANCE?**  
How will you measure and evaluate success/failure?
- 10 EVALUATION: IS THE POLICY WORKING?**  
When and how will you review this policy? Has the context changed? Have UK objectives/interests changed? Do you need to change direction?



# Are you ready?

■ **In operational policy-making, the pace is likely to be unrelenting, timescales tight and decisions required under pressure. Sometimes decisions will need to be taken very quickly. This isn't going to be perfect, but you need to do your best to make it so. That means:**

- Building in sufficient **challenge, diversity of thought** and **critical thinking** to head off groupthink.
  - Challenge can come through 'red-teaming' (where an independent group offers challenge); inviting diverse thinking (including independent or external viewpoints) into the process; and wargaming.
  - The MOD's guide on how to invite and offer challenge is at the back of this handbook.
- Finding time to **reflect** so that you can think strategically.
- Accessing the **experience** and **expertise** of those who have done something similar before, to help avoid the pitfalls.

- Enacting the **complementary dynamic between military and Civil Service** perspectives, ensuring robust debate about the proposed approach.
- Being confident that our **channels for ground truth** are robust and credible, and are reaching the top of the decision-making process.
- **Iterating** often enough to ensure that our understanding remains current.

■ **You should be concerned if the real world is sending you the following signals:**

- The desired **end-state** looks increasingly unachievable.
- There is **divergence** between what is actually happening and understanding of it at the strategic decision-making level.
- There is a gap between **public rhetoric** and our **ability to deliver**. Does the **narrative** lack credibility?
- Available **resources** fall short of the ambition; and there's no flex should something go wrong.

- **Decisions** are being made, but some parts of the Department or Government aren't implementing them.
  - **Additional commitments** are being assumed without full exposure of the implications at the strategic decision-making level – the **tactical tail** is wagging the **strategic dog**.
  - Something is **obviously wrong**, but **no-one is questioning it**.
  - **You should be concerned if decision-making is displaying any of the following tendencies:**
    - Collective understanding feels more like '**groupthink**' than a rational assessment of the situation based on diverse viewpoints.
    - No-one is applying **critical thinking** to the options; or it feels like you're working off a **best-case scenario**.
- 
- The **strategy** is weak; poorly articulated; unchanging when everything around it is; or being re-written constantly without ever being finalised (and with no evidence that it can be or is being implemented).
  - Effective **decision-making** is clearly impaired by structures, processes or tribalism (for example, people are **fighting their institutional corners** rather than thinking about the national interest).
  - **Excessive self-confidence** ('**hubris**') or **inertia** are shaping our involvement ('something like this worked before, so will again').
  - The **timescales** for decision-making are being compressed by politics/military planning rather than by real world developments.
  - We aren't **stopping doing** the things that aren't working.

# Are you ready?

- If you are concerned, this is the time to challenge:



## EVERYONE CAN CHALLENGE

Appropriate challenge is about the issue, not the person



## INVITING CHALLENGE

Everyone can and should invite challenge  
Different views = better outcomes



## OFFERING CHALLENGE

Choose your moment  
Explain your logic and reasoning  
Keep it concise and relevant

- **This is not optional: it is your duty to invite and offer challenge in the interest of good decisions.**

□ The full Guide to Reasonable Challenge is at the back of this handbook.



■ **As the demands on your time grow – briefing, attending meetings, dealing with an overloaded inbox, making phone calls, travelling – you need to ensure that due process isn't neglected. Success rests on it.**

□ You should give the National Security Council, Ministers, the Permanent Secretary, Chiefs and senior decision-

makes an **accurate, timely** and **comprehensive picture** of the situation, constantly iterated, in line with our developing understanding and with viable options at every stage.

□ At the same time, the **briefing cycle** can easily become self-justifying, or worse still, displacement activity for actual work or decisions. Guard against it.

# Are you ready?

- Ensure that the team is adequately resourced, early enough, to manage the process, including the **scrutiny** that will parallel, and probably significantly outlive, the operation itself. Prep for **inquiries, legal reviews** and **challenges**.
  - There will need to be a robust **audit trail**, including the means to capture key data in-theatre, and in the UK to ensure that good data standards apply, particularly when information is released onto the public record. Part of this is keeping a record of **key decisions**, including the supporting rationale, retrievable for future reference and scrutiny.
- Make sure you know who is **accountable** for what; and that you bear **personal responsibility** for your contribution.
  - You should learn **lessons** as you go, and for all time.





## The Checklist asks:

Why do we care?

What does this mean for British interests?

What are the risks of acting or doing nothing, including in the longer term?

What is different now?

- **It is essential to understand the policy objectives in any operation. You need to have a clear concept in your mind not only of how it starts, but also how it ends (or transitions into steady state). You need to have a credible 'story arc'; and a narrative rooted firmly in and aligned with our actions, and in ground truth.**

- **You need to be able to articulate all of this in a vision, a narrative statement of what the operation is designed to achieve, and why it is worth doing – why we care.**
- **Ask yourself what success or failure look like.**
  - Are you seeking to make a **lasting change** to the situation; contain it; or simply prevent failure?
  - Will the operation serve **British interests**?
  - How will the **UK's reputation** emerge from the operation?
  - For major operations, what will be the **judgement of history**?
  - If there is no reasonable prospect of **success**, is it the right thing to do?
  - Are we exposing ourselves to any new **risks** (e.g. military or economic)?

■ **As you develop your vision, you need to understand what problem it is that you think an operation will fix.**

- Will an operation remove a **direct threat** to the UK?
- Are we doing this to support **NATO** (perhaps under Article 5), a coalition or an ally or partner?
- Is the vision shared with **Allies or partners**, and what will they be contributing?
- Is the vision shared with **local partners**, and what will their role be?

- Are we seeking to restore **peace and stability**?
- Will it change the **world order** for the better?
- Are we supporting **humanitarian assistance, disaster response or a rescue mission**?
- Is it a problem we have **encountered before**; and if so, were we successful last time? What did we **learn** from this? Or is it **novel**?
- What has **changed** that means we feel we need to act?



**Article 5 of the Washington Treaty enshrines the principle of collective defence, in which an attack against one North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Ally is considered an attack against all Allies.**

# The Vision



■ **At the same time, you should consider whether the operation is justifiable.**

- Is the **threat** serious?
- Is the **purpose** of any military action clear?
- Is there any other **remedy** for or means to resolve the problem?
- Is the force to be used **proportional**; and are its **resource demands** in reasonable proportion to UK interests?
- Are the likely **consequences** acceptable?
- Do we have the option of **doing nothing**?

■ **We should not assume that there is inevitably a military dimension: in fact, the starting assumption should be that there isn't. Any military contribution should be argued into the vision, not taken as read.**

- What are **Partners Across Government** doing and is any proposed military operation coherent with their actions?



## The Checklist asks:

What is happening now?

What are your sources of ground truth/evidence?

Have assumptions been exposed to analytical tools or external challenge?

- **Developing your understanding through robust analysis is a key Chilcot theme. Your understanding of what is happening now will be imperfect, and recognising this limitation is key to any realistic assessment of the situation, noting that the point at which we intervene and have the greatest potential to effect change is also the point where our understanding is lowest.**

- **Understanding, and the analysis that supports it, informs and underpins the Vision, as much as it supports all the other headings in the Chilcot Checklist. Never think of it as an afterthought.**
- **At the same time, we need to ensure that we optimise our understanding, whatever the real world constraints.**
  - Do you really understand what is happening now in terms of its **root causes** and likely **evolution**?
  - Do you know how to measure **success**?
  - Have you assessed the relative **risks**, including to the world order we want to see, of the various courses of action, including doing nothing?
  - Have you commissioned a **Joint Assessment of Conflict and Stability** (JACS) from the Stabilisation Unit? Having a JACS can establish a solid basis of understanding for many interventions.

- Do you really understand **our own political, economic and military** drivers? Do these add up to a convincing reason to do this? What are the **strategic implications** for the UK?
- Is now the **right time** for the operation, or would the chances of success be increased by lengthening the preparation time?
- At heart, do you really understand what the **British interest** is?
- **You cannot make these judgements with confidence unless you are sure of your evidence base.**
  - Are you gathering the **evidence you need** to support decision-making; and ensuring you aren't just providing the evidence you think people want to hear?
  - Is the analysis you are receiving drawing on all relevant **sources** – intelligence, diplomatic reporting, open source, academic, digital (including data analytics and social media) or specifically commissioned analysis – to develop understanding, collectively in the MOD and across Government?

- Do you have the **subject matter experts** you need to generate and validate the evidence you need? Are you using **enterprise social media** and **directories** to identify expertise and experience within the Department and beyond?
- Are there any particular sources that ring **alarm bells**? Are they telling you the things they think you want to hear? Do they have an agenda which shapes the information they are providing?
- If decisions rest on **one or two key elements of analysis**, are you sure that these are as robust as they absolutely need to be?
- **You need relentlessly (and reasonably) to challenge the evidence.**
  - Are you sure that the **evidence is the best available**, and not just a briefer's short-cut?
  - Are you and others challenging (for example, through red-teaming) what appear to be **poorly-evidenced propositions** and checking that intelligence is credible?

- Are **diverse viewpoints** being brought into the discussion; and is the evidence constantly being **challenged** through red-teaming, wargaming or 'pre-mortems'?
- Is there any sense of **unrealistic optimism** ('optimism bias') creeping in, and if so, are you rooting it out? And are people's views becoming **more entrenched** when presented with contradictory evidence ('confirmation bias'); and if so, are you confronting that?
- **An important component of the analysis concerns the context for the operation, and the intentions and capability of any potential adversary. You need to understand:**
  - The **political, economic** and **social structures** you are dealing with in the theatre of operations; the **culture**, including religious, ethnic or ideological drivers; and the principal **personalities**, their motivations, how they interconnect and where our priorities lie in terms of engaging them.
  - The key **global** and **regional players**, their motivations and their likely responses.
  - The state and capability of the **security forces**, particularly the armed forces, the police, intelligence/internal security forces and any irregular forces (including those driven by ideological, religious or sectarian factors).
  - If you're going to be on the ground for a while, the **bureaucratic structures** that run the country, including how deep ruling party membership (or similar) goes; the **infrastructure**, including what is likely to work, and what not, while we are present; and what **NGOs** are, or might become, active on the ground.
  - The impact on relevant **communities in the UK**; and how they might help us understand the dynamics in their parent country (a Home Office lead).
  - The impact of the operation in **other regions, countries or domains**, such as cyber and space.
  - The likely **impact** of this operation on the country and its populace, including factors such as protection of non-combatants and gender issues. What do **local communities** want?





## The Checklist asks:

What might happen next?

Have you looked at a range of options, and scenarios and consequences that could flow from these?

- **Thinking through scenarios is where you get to exercise foresight – a key Chilcot theme.**
- **There will be a tendency to think about what is going to happen in a linear way: our processes tend to lead us that way, and people are psychologically hard-wired to avoid changing direction. But the chances are that it won't be like that. You need constantly to regard the main narrative with healthy**

**scepticism, and to think through the range of other possible scenarios. That means:**

- Ensuring that you do not get trapped in a **linear assessment** of possible scenarios – seek out unorthodox or radical viewpoints to test your thinking. Bear in mind that such viewpoints could also well be right, just not mainstream, and may in consequence require an adjustment to your approach.
- Mapping the range of **possible paths** down which the operation could travel, assigning probabilities to their likelihood and assessing their impact if they do happen.



- There will also be issues that sit in your **peripheral vision**, perhaps pushed to one side by the prevailing narrative, and yet which could be crucial to the success of the operation.
  - Identifying such issues is one reason that finding **time away from the daily battle rhythm** is so important – they may only become apparent when you have the space to reflect.
- There may also be **less predictable events** that could radically change the outlook. These might include coalition, Alliance or domestic political factors, such as elections, competing priorities between domestic and foreign policy or resource pressures. Any adversary may also behave in ways that hadn't been anticipated, and which could crucially undermine

# Scenarios

achievement of our objectives (for example, they might receive unexpected or covert assistance from another actor).

- Mapping out the potential for any of these scenarios to become reality is crucial to development of options and detailed planning.





## The Checklist asks:

What should we do?

Have you designed your options collaboratively, built in challenge and presented Ministers with clear information on risks, opportunities and costs?

- With a vision, a good understanding of the situation and some feel for the potential scenarios, the next dimension of exercising foresight is development of options.
- These need to be driven by the overall Government perspective, as captured and promulgated by the NSC process – not by individual Departmental aspirations or capabilities. In turn, the overall Government perspective will reflect the international context, including any NATO or coalition lead.
- One of the national security Departments should be in the lead, subcontracted to NSC. That is probably not the MOD, which should in general act in support of wider Government objectives.
- The lead Government Department does however need to have the resources, outlook and organisational capability to be able to undertake this responsibility. A pragmatic conversation at the outset about whether this is the case will save embarrassment later; but also makes it possible to consider early reinforcement of the lead Department's capacity to co-ordinate should that be necessary.

- The options themselves should be in broad outline – they are not the detailed planning itself. You should include the range of options, including ‘do nothing’, and assess the costs and benefits of each, as well as the risks involved.

- While you will clearly offer recommendations, you should keep open the possibility that other options might move to the fore should other scenarios materialise. Groupthink around the prevailing narrative can set it in stone – don’t let this happen.



# Options

- **A key element of the options will be to ensure that the military dimension is kept in proportion, with diplomatic and other avenues given full weight. You should not be tempted into enlarging the military dimension of any option for its own sake (for example, to feed a single Service agenda to showcase particular capabilities) or in pursuit of increased influence, as force size and influence are only weakly correlated.**
- **Similarly, you should be looking for the right mix of civilian and military contributions, not skewed towards the military dimension because it offers available resource.**





# Legal Implications

## The Checklist asks:

How do we ensure action is lawful?

What is the wider legal context?

Are Ministers aware of these legal risks?

What are the policy implications?

How will you ensure that any international legal basis remains sound if circumstances change?

- The UK conducts military operations in accordance with the rule of law, and therefore the decision to use force in military operations must be lawful, and so too must the way in which it is used.
- The law which governs these decisions comprises:

- UK domestic law.
- International human rights law, principally the European Convention on Human Rights.
- International Humanitarian law, also called the Law of Armed Conflict, principally the Geneva Conventions.

- In many cases you will be looking for a specific framework – for example, a United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) – to ensure the operation’s legality.
- The interface between the legal and policy dimensions of an operation is the crucial point at which its legitimacy is determined. Never underestimate the extent to which that is the case, and the potential hangover into the period after conflict if that interface is an uncomfortable one.

- **As a policy-maker, it is your job to work at this point of legitimacy, keeping Ministers abreast of the legal dimension at all stages of the operation.**
- **Circumstances will change – for example, in transition to steady state – so you’ll need to ensure that the legal framework still applies, and work to change it if it doesn’t.**

**That could mean a new UNSCR, or a new status of forces agreement.**

- **You may not be involved in the decision whether the use of force is lawful or not. But, whatever your position in the Department, you are entitled to understand the thinking behind that decision.**



# Legal Implications

- **By contrast, if UK forces are committed to combat, very many people in the MOD will be involved in decisions about how it is to be conducted.**
  - **These decisions will frequently arise over matters such as:**
    - Targeting.
    - Detention.
    - Interrogation.
    - Status of Forces.
    - Rules of Engagement.
  - **If you are working on these matters you have a personal responsibility to ensure that your decisions, or your advice, comply with the law.**
- **Your decisions must be based on a clear appraisal of what the law requires, and where the law is unclear – as it often is – they must be based on an analysis of the legal risk.**
  - **Naturally the leading role in this appraisal will be played by the Government’s lawyers. But if you are not a lawyer you should still make sure that you understand the advice and ask questions if you think that anything has not been taken into account or given sufficient weight.**



# Policy and Strategy

## The Checklist asks:

### What does success look like?

Does a clear strategy, and a feasible course of action that will meet policy objectives, exist?

Is the approach supported by analysis?

■ You've moved beyond the vision and options stage, and you're thinking about solidifying this into policy and then, with implementation in mind, a strategy. Now that you have a better understanding of all the factors involved, you need to remind yourself what success looks like.

- Is our **policy ambition** still realistic? Are we being **pragmatic** about the prospects for change?

- Will our policy serve **British interests**?
- What will this do to our **reputation**?
- What will the **world order** look like in consequence?
- How is the **narrative** holding up, across Government, the Alliance or Coalition and globally; and with the public?
- What aspects of our thinking are **mission critical** rather than just nice-to-have?

■ **Policy is just a statement of intent: the strategy will deliver that intent supported by a detailed plan (see 'Planning and Doing', page 47). You need to have a credible, fully worked-through strategy, with the outline timelines, milestones, accountabilities and resource awareness that will be detailed in the plan, agreed across Government and, where necessary, with Allies or coalition partners.**



- Ideally, there should be a single strategy across Government, owned by the NSC. The strategy needs to be adequately resourced and, if it isn't, rethought.
- Where appropriate, you should consider weighting the strategy towards its early stages to maximise the prospects for success, and to avoid the need for catch-up should you realise that the strategy is under-resourced.
- The strategy should anticipate a viable transition between operational phases, from planning, through the initial operation and (where appropriate) stabilisation, and then into steady state.

# Policy and Strategy

- **The strategy should clearly define our longer-term policy towards the affected area, our residual footprint and any continuing liabilities that might incur. It should map out the other bilateral or multilateral relationships that we will need to maintain during the operation, including any political factors affecting partners' decision-making.**
  - **It should guard against technical fixes to political problems in the affected area (for example, generation of security forces to compensate for the weakness of existing state structures).**
- **If the strategy is clear on the need for the military instrument, it needs also to be clear on its integration with other instruments such as finance, reconstruction and diplomacy.**





## The Checklist asks:

What do we need to deliver?

What are the resource implications of your options?

- The operation will fall short, or fail, without adequate **resource**.
  - You need then to deliver not only a force that is appropriate in its size and capability, but also the **cross-Government** resources that will mean the force has real utility. An early appreciation of the real world **financial and human resource constraints** on the operation is essential.
  - Your options for the **force** should be driven primarily by military considerations rather than a perceived need to gain influence.
- The force should of course be given the **equipment** – particularly force protection – it needs, and where it is not, the relevant **capability gaps** should be flagged as soon as possible as risks, including at Ministerial level where appropriate. There should be clear, named **accountability for equipment** issues relating to the operation.
  - Remember the basic premise that Defence is funded to deliver forces ready for operations, but the **additional costs of operations** (weapons expenditure, charter transport costs etc) should not fall to the core Defence Budget.

- You should expect some **scrutiny** regarding the size and structure of any deployment, which will come from higher command, but also from the Treasury or other Departments that are funding the operation. This is normal scrutiny, should be accepted and should be responded to quickly. Occasionally, this information will determine whether the military are used at all (for example, DFID may be considering delivering aid through commercial charter aircraft or using military).
- Ultimately, though, you should be prepared to be firm on what is needed to complete the task you have been asked to undertake.
- The **Urgent Capability Requirement (UCR)** process is the stop gap for when you do not have the right capability to hand – it isn't a substitute for routine capability development – and you need to ensure that it is working effectively.
- **Longer-term requirements shouldn't prejudice near-term operational demands.** If there is a strong case for a capability now, don't trade it for a capability that won't arrive until well into the future.
- Most UCRs are funded from within the Defence Budget, which means another programme could potentially be cancelled to meet your **requirement**. As such, you should be sure of the requirement and expect that only enough capability will be bought to support your operation, with a marginal uplift for training for operations and sustainment. Capability 'nice-to-haves' should not creep in.

- If you are unfamiliar with the **process** you should seek advice, because a poorly staffed requirement will delay the introduction of the capabilities you need. Despite the name, many UCRs cover complex technical equipment and the capability may not be delivered even in your own tour, which you will need to factor into your planning.
- While you may be aware of broader **financial pressures** on the MOD, if you need the requirement you should state it quickly and clearly.
- The force needs also to be **sustainable**, including for possibly longer-than-anticipated deployments, with resilient logistics and trained and acclimatised personnel. This includes ascertaining which elements of **sustainability** – for example, munitions – may require early intervention with **industry** to ensure continued supply. It's essential to ensure that these plans are **affordable** within likely resource constraints.
- Ensure that you are **prioritising** effectively, and not getting drawn into lower priority tasks because they are easier; and that the **command and control** arrangements are appropriate to the operation, as simple as possible and adaptable to changing circumstances.

- **The operation won't be taking place in isolation: together with the other operations underway, it will be placing stress on the overall force structure and equipment programme. It could be presenting a major opportunity cost to other activity, including beyond its planned timeframe.**
- **You need to keep this in mind as you plan, including in relation to the path towards Defence Planning**

**Assumptions (DPAs) and the readiness of force elements on that path. That might mean mitigation (for example, through coalition partners) to bring the force into closer alignment with DPAs.**

- **The resource requirement will also change with each phase of the operation. You'll need to ensure that you retain sufficient resource in reserve to be able to respond to the unexpected, or to a change in**



the strategy or plan; or at least to be aware where any **additional military resource or civil capability** is going to come from.

- **Getting the right resource means developing a strong relationship with Partners Across Government, including HM Treasury. You should establish early on what access to funding the operation will have, including the HMT Special Reserve, Deployed Military Activity Pool and the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund.**
- **The civilian effort needs to be resourced in correct proportion to the military contribution. You need to identify the right people, from UK Government, the private sector, coalition partners or locally, who are going to ensure this operation is a success.**

- **Resource management of the operation extends into the detail:**
  - Whether to support **new infrastructure** when an operation is drawing to a close.
  - **Gifting** of equipment and other assets such as buildings.
  - Mobilisation of **reservists**.
  - Any **contingency contracts** for goods and services to support the operation.
  - Which **equipment** we're bringing home (and making financial provision for it in the core programme).
  - Use of appropriate UK **policing** resources (civil constabulary, MOD Police or Royal Military Police, noting that you may need to look to Allies or partners if the requirement is for a gendarmerie capability).
  - Provision of adequate **support** (mental health, decompression) for UK personnel.
  - Adequate resource for **information operations** and **strategic communications**.



# Planning and Doing

## The Checklist asks:

How should we do it?

Have you planned for a range of possible contingencies?

Who is accountable and responsible for what?

- With the policy intent in place and the strategy outlined, you are now in a position to plan in detail. You should do this in an organised way, using a proven planning methodology (for example, the military 'estimate' process or the RCDS strategic assessment tool (see Further reading)).
- A key part of this activity is assessing the risks involved; and if they materialise, planning for what to do about them. Your risk register should encompass not only the obvious ones (for example, threat to life), but also 'softer' risks such as reputation (for example, the communications repercussions of failure).
- You should establish a clear audit trail setting out accountabilities and responsibilities; and communicate decisions effectively, with clarity, to those expected to implement them, while ensuring that those implementing decisions are resourced to do so, and understand their accountabilities and responsibilities.

- **The plan needs to be drawn up with (and jointly owned by) Partners Across Government. This, then, is the time to build in a regular cross-Government meetings pattern to ensure common situational awareness and buy-in by all involved. Clearly NSC will be at the pinnacle of this, but you should ensure it is adequately supported by whatever sub-committee structure is warranted. You should also ensure that the meetings pattern is proportionate, and does not become displacement for actual activity; the same for the briefing cycle.**
- **For any significant operation, Chilcot recommends putting in place a Ministerially-led team to ensure strategic coherence across Government. You'll have to consider whether this is appropriate to your operation.**

- The **Minister** could be from the Cabinet Office, or a sub-contracted departmental Minister.
  - The team itself should comprise a **mix of subject matter experts** from across Government, with good links back into their parent Departments and expertise in the essential elements of the operation (military and civilian planning, finance, legal, communications etc.).
- **You'll need to develop or share the plan with international partners, and secure commitments from other nations to play their part in delivering it.**
  - **That means meeting Allies or coalition partners often enough to stay in each other's minds – do you really understand their intent, and what they expect from the UK? Do they understand yours? You should set up formal arrangements (including written understandings)**



# Planning and Doing

to ensure UK Government has sufficient influence in the conduct of the operation and clearly stated constraints on its participation.

- That means defining clear negotiating objectives with allies or partners, particularly the lead nation; and putting in place the people capable of negotiating effectively.
- You should also engage realistically, sensitively and broadly with local partners, including trying to include as many as possible.
- You should seek host nation support as required; and develop, where necessary, a suitable Status of Forces Agreement for any residual presence.



- Also pin down those key elements of important detail such as casualty reporting, next-of-kin procedures, repatriation and (with the Stabilisation Unit) Security Sector Reform (SSR).

- SSR can be particularly challenging, and the chances of failure are significant, whichever nation (the UK or an Ally/partner) is taking the lead; do not underestimate the risk here.

- The chances are that things will turn out differently to how you planned. You will need to retain sufficient flexibility in your planning, bearing in mind available resource, to adapt if circumstances change. That means having a credible contingency plan (or plans); working out what degree of change would be required before we change the plan; and ensuring you have the necessary resources in reserve to deliver it.



# Planning and Doing

- **The narrative now needs to be communicated to the various audiences it affects, globally, domestically and in-theatre, offering coherent, if not identical, messages to different audiences. Political, diplomatic, economic and social communications activities need to take place in tandem with any military dimension; and strategic communications should be managed as closely as the military campaign.**
- **At the same time, you should do what you can to help other actors in the establishment or strengthening of the political settlement; recognising that provision of security is a major factor in generating wider confidence in any settlement; and acknowledging that our engagement won't be perceived as 'neutral' by one or more parties.**
- **Some of the impact from the operation may occur well outside the country or region in question. There may be domestic implications (for example, migration, terrorism, organised crime or hostile information operations) on which you may need to engage domestic Departments. The impacts could be in other domains such as cyber or space.**



# Policy Performance

## The Checklist asks:

How will you monitor performance?

How will you measure and evaluate success/failure?

- You've defined success (and failure) in broad terms as you've thought about the vision, the policy and the strategy. This is a **cross-Government issue**, not confined to MOD. Now you need to measure it.
- Someone in Government, and the Department, should be given clear responsibility for monitoring performance. They should establish robust **objectives** and associated **metrics** with which to measure the success of the plan, with agreed, credible **criteria** for progress

(particularly with regard to the stability of any political settlement, violence levels, governance and Security Sector Reform); and with the original end-state in sight (not a modified one to make achievement easier – unless there has been a formal restatement of the desired end-state).

- If things get difficult, **avoid the temptation to soften the criteria for transition; this will render any 'conditions-based' assessment of success increasingly meaningless.**



■ You need to put in place a credible, evidence-based process for regular review of achievement against the strategy/plan. That means setting achievable and measurable milestones, with effective integration of civilian

and military objectives; and reviewing achievement of these milestones regularly and realistically, based on ground truth, and not adjusted to meet campaign or political objectives.

# Policy Performance

- You need also to consider that, if we are falling short of our milestones, the **strategy** itself could be wrong. You should ask yourself whether the security, political, economic, social, infrastructural, humanitarian and cultural elements of the situation are as we expected to find them; and if not, what does that say about the strategy?
- It isn't just actual achievement on the ground; it's also **perception** of achievement. You will wish then to track the **political will** and **public support** behind the operation, in case it changes if the situation is more challenging than anticipated. You should be alive to **domestic pressure** to expedite transition. You should also be alive to **mission creep**, and its implications for the composition of the force and the nature of its deployment.



# RESEARCH, INSIGHT & EVALUATION



## The Checklist asks:

Is the policy working?

When and how will you review this policy?

Has the context changed?

Have UK objectives/interests changed?

Do you need to change direction?

- The operation is underway. You've established the means by which to measure success, across Government; now you need to do so and adjust accordingly. That involves conducting the regular reviews you set out to do and addressing the significance of what you know about the situation.

- How has the **world changed** around the original vision, policy and strategy?
- Is the **narrative** holding up? Does the vision still make sense?
- Is the **adversary** behaving as expected, or in a radically different way?
- Are **second or third order effects** impacting on the strategic success of the operation?
- Are we in danger of leaving a **security or governance vacuum** which our adversaries might fill?
- Is the operation **achieving the goals** set by the Government, and contributing to the **world order** we want to see?
- Does the **end result** justify the military and civilian resources expended?
- Has the **planning process** been effective?
- Is the **right thing** being done, just not quickly enough?

## ■ If the situation has changed:

- Is there still a **common understanding** of this across Government (and across the Alliance or coalition), and a **common sense of purpose** to deal with the implications?
- Do the **strategic objectives** for the campaign remain valid?
- Are the **military strategic objectives** still aligned with the policy intent?
- Are **resources** still aligned with objectives?



# Evaluation

- Overall, have things changed to the degree that we need to alter course altogether; or will a minor course correction suffice? At this stage, you will have to hope that you built sufficient flexibility into the plan for it to be adjusted.
- A starting point is protecting and sustaining the gains we have made. Beyond that, you may need to consider the need to surge or re-enter the operation, depending on the political appetite to do so.
- Overall, do you have a good feeling for what hindsight will say about this operation?
- Will people judge that you did all the right things, whatever the outcome; or that you clung to a plan when it was failing, and when you had clear evidence it was failing?



- Will you be held to account for your actions?
- And will you, in the cold light of day and as objectively as possible, feel justified in having taken them?



# Further Reading

**The following documents give more detailed guidance on some of the issues outlined in this handbook:**

- **Understanding and Decision-Making**, Joint Doctrine Publication – 04 (JDP 04), Joint Development and Doctrine Centre, Ministry of Defence, 2nd Edition December 2016.
- **Getting Strategy Right (Enough)**, Royal College of Defence Studies, 4 September 2017 (includes 12 step strategic assessment tool).
- **Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability – Guidance Note**, Stabilisation Unit, April 2017.
- **The Report of the Iraq Inquiry**, Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors, July 2016.
- **Lesson Encountered, Learning from the Long War**, Edited by Richard D. Hooker, Jr., and Joseph J. Collins, Sept 2015.

# Embracing Challenge

## Reasonable Challenge: A Guide

The Iraq Inquiry (Chilcot) Report tells us that it's important to avoid 'groupthink' as we develop policy, and the best antidote to that is **reasonable challenge**. An environment in which challenge is expected and accepted is important. People should be receptive to reasonable challenge and assume that it is provided with the best of intentions, while those offering challenge should know how to do so effectively. Challenge isn't about proving someone right or wrong; rather it's about highlighting and exploring alternative options. These cultures and behaviours reflect a healthy organisation and we have created the following guide to support their development.

For those **receiving challenge**, you should:

- Not take it personally - the challenge isn't about you, it's about the issue at hand.
- Make it known that you welcome reasonable challenge, and create space in the way you run your business to receive it. Recognise that challenge might result in change.
- Seek real diversity of thought, not just shades of mainstream thinking.
- Give staff the opportunity to fully articulate different views and give them credit for doing so. And remember that the person challenging shouldn't be expected to have a solution there and then.
- Demonstrate that you are giving serious thought to the challenge being offered - do not dismiss it out of hand and make sure people aren't just telling you what you want to hear.
- Respond respectfully - never belittle someone's view, and never (even after the event) sideline those offering it.
- If you do not accept the challenge, explain your reasoning, including supporting evidence when necessary.
- Encourage the use of evidence from beyond the immediate organisation, think tanks, academia and other sources.
- Support both junior colleagues and peers to raise a challenge with more senior colleagues.

For those **offering challenge**, you should:

- Make challenge with courtesy and politeness.
- Be prepared to explain the logic and reasoning behind your alternative view and provide evidence. Keep your challenge concise and relevant to the issue at hand.
- Think about the interpersonal dynamics. Keep it professional - it's the issue you're challenging, not the person. Be respectful to the approach from which you are differing.
- Choose your moment and your medium. A one-to-one discussion or a smaller team meeting may be more appropriate than a big meeting at which positions are being taken and decisions are expected; a gently probing conversation or email is better than a confrontational one.
- Raise issues in a timely manner. Don't leave your challenge too late in the process, when changing course could be too difficult.
- Accept if the eventual decision remains unchanged - a decision has to be taken once all reasonable challenge has been considered. Only in cases where regularity or propriety have not been observed should you need to turn to the Department's whistleblowing process.



