Part I

Strategic context

1 Towards a sociology of military transformation

Afghanistan

On 18 August 2008, a company of French paratroopers, recently deployed to Afghanistan by President Sarkozy, were patrolling in the Sorobi district some 40 miles east of Kabul when they were caught in an ambush by insurgent forces. The ambush developed into a running battle which lasted 36 hours and was eventually terminated after US air strikes. Ten French soldiers were killed and a further twenty-one were wounded in the ambush and the fighting which followed.[1] Disturbingly, four of those killed seemed to have been captured and executed. It was the single worst loss of French forces for twenty-five years, and the greatest loss of life for NATO forces in Afghanistan caused by enemy action since 2005. On 21 August, the soldiers, all awarded the Légion d'Honneur, were buried in France with full military honours. It was of immense significance that the funeral service was not only attended by (a visibly shaken) President Nicolas Sarkozy and other senior ministers, but took place at Les Invalides in Paris, the site of Napoleon's tomb. In this way, the paratroopers' deaths were linked with a grand tradition of national sacrifice and honour. After the ceremony, Sarkozy affirmed France's commitment to Afghanistan: 'We don't have the right to lose over there, we cannot renounce our values.'[2] A month later, *Paris Match* published an interview with the insurgents responsible for the attack.[3] They were pictured on the front cover of the famous magazine wearing the combat smocks, helmets and watches of some of the paratroopers whom they had killed.[4] Their leader,

[1] It later transpired that the Italians had made an agreement with local insurgents, paying them not to attack coalition forces. The French were unaware of this arrangement.
[2] www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2–17064886.html.
[3] Although described as Taliban, the fighters were probably from Gulbaddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami, an Islamicist mujahiddin group which had been involved in fighting since the Soviet invasion.
[4] The photograph of the Taliban fighter on the front cover has intriguing parallels with the famous picture of the saluting black French soldier which Roland Barthes famously analysed in *Mythologies* (1972). It is unclear whether the editors of the magazine were deliberately drawing upon this historical connotation when they published the image.

Commander Farouki, claimed they were tipped off about the French mission in their area and were able to prepare an ambush with 140 highly trained insurgents. Although he denied the rumours of torture, he boasted that 'If night hadn't fallen we'd have killed every one of the soldiers.'[5] The publication of the photograph caused outrage in France; Sarkozy described the Taliban as 'barbaric' and 'medieval'. Others, including the mothers of one of the deceased, demanded the withdrawal of troops, while opinion polls suggested that two-thirds of the population were against the deployment.

On 11 March 2004, while promoting his proposed reforms of the Bundeswehr and attempting to sustain popular support for Germany's involvement in Afghanistan, Peter Struck, the German Defence Minister, famously declared that 'Germany is also defended in the Hindu Kush.' The death of the French paratroopers in 2008 demonstrates the potentially fatal implications of Struck's aphorism for Europe's armed forces more widely; nearly 500 European soldiers had been killed in Afghanistan by the beginning of 2010. Those deaths might be taken as a signifier of a fundamental strategic re-orientation in Europe. Within fifteen years of the end of the Cold War, Europe's military focus has switched from the Rhine to the Hindu Kush. Yet this re-orientation is not merely geographical, it also represents a transformation of strategic culture. The fact that the paratroopers killed in Sarobi were French illustrated this shift very clearly. Since its withdrawal from NATO's integrated military command in 1966, France had always been the European nation least committed to NATO and it had few, if any direct, strategic interests in engaging in Afghanistan. Yet here in August 2008 the most US- and NATO-sceptical nation suffered the single greatest loss inflicted by enemy forces on any European country. France, and by extension Europe, has now committed itself to a globalised counter-insurgency in Afghanistan alongside US allies. The move to the Hindu Kush demonstrates an increasing interdependence of European states in an unstable global order and, in the security sphere, their increasing, though contentious, allegiance to the United States.

The re-orientation to the Hindu Kush represents a rupture not just in where Europe's armed forces operate, but also how they are increasingly trying to conduct their campaigns. Although it threatened nuclear oblivion, the Cold War, as a competition between recognised state militaries fighting for territorial sovereignty, was a conventional conflict. In Afghanistan, Europe's forces are engaged in a quite different venture. They are seeking to re-build a fragmented state while confronting

[5] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7598816.stm.

irregular, insurgent forces. It is not merely that the opponents which Europe's forces face are unconventional. The very way in which European forces are prosecuting this campaign is profoundly different from twentieth-century approaches. The mass divisions of the Cold War are absent; European forces under NATO are actively avoiding any repetition of the heavy Soviet approach of the 1980s (Grau 1998). Instead, relatively small numbers of Western troops, co-operating with each other ever more closely, utilising digital communications, precision-guided munitions delivered from the air, new surveillance assets, including unmanned aerial vehicles, are trying to pacify hostile groups while facilitating the stabilisation of the country. Indeed, the move to the Hindu Kush might be seen as a revision of the European way in warfare. In the twenty-first century, mass armies dedicated to national territorial defence against the forces of other states are being replaced by smaller, professionalised forces which are increasingly engaged in global stabilisation missions. This move to the Hindu Kush, geographically and conceptually, is central to any account of contemporary European military transformation.

The research

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been extensive research into the issue of European security and defence. Given the speed and scale of the changes, this intense academic interest is only to be expected. Scholars have accordingly analysed the changing nature of warfare: they have examined national, EU and NATO security and defence policy[6] and they have explored the institutional transformation of the armed forces themselves at national, EU and NATO levels.[7] Seth Jones' recent work (2007) on the development of EU security co-operation is one of the more prominent recent contributions to this literature. There, he claims that his study 'offers a comprehensive approach' (Jones 2007: 5); it analyses all the relevant data. The present study sets itself more modest objectives. It aims to examine how Europe's armed forces are re-organising themselves and revising established practices in the face of alternative missions. However,

[6] For example, Biscop 2005; Buzan *et al.* 1990; Cornish and Edwards 2001; Gnesotto 2004; Howorth 1995, 2000, 2001, 2007; Howorth and Menon 1997; Kupchan 2000; Menon 2000, 2009; Missiroli 2003; Shepherd 2000, 2003; Smith 2004; Tonra 2001; Webber *et al.* 2002.

[7] Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1997; Bellamy 1996; Böene 2003; Booth *et al.* 2001; Burk 2003a, 2003b; Dandeker 1994, 2003; Demchak 2003; Dorman *et al.* 2002; Farrell 2008; Forster 2006; Kaplan 2004; Moskos *et al.* 2000; Risse-Kappen 1997; Schmidt 2001; Sloan 2003; Terriff *et al.* 2004a, 2004b; Thies 2003, 2007; Yost 2000a, 2000b.

it does not claim to provide a definitive analysis of all European military transformation today. A complete analysis of European military transformation would require the investigation of the armed forces of all EU and non-EU European nations. Consequently, current changes involve over a million European service personnel and a vast array of institutions. The armed forces of each nation consist of headquarters, divisions, fleets, air wings, training establishments and logistic bases. The EU and NATO also have their own structures and assets, each of which is undergoing interesting and important formation or re-formation. A comprehensive analysis would need to conduct research on a large sample of this military population and establish the interconnections between all these armed forces and the institutions which they comprise. No attempt at such universality is attempted here. It would be impossible to analyse the transformation of all these institutions in all these different countries in a single study. Indeed, it is questionable whether genuine comprehensiveness is possible or even desirable in this (or any other) area.

For heuristic purposes, a much narrower perspective is taken here. Since it is concerned not with defence policy, but specifically with armed forces, this study seeks to examine European developments at the 'operational' and 'tactical' levels. The operational level refers to the planning of campaigns; in short, it refers to what happens in major military headquarters, especially those which are designated for command at the corps level (60,000 troops). The tactical level refers to the activities conducted by European forces in theatre as they engage with local populations, friendly or otherwise. In this study, the tactical level is located at the level of the brigade (approximately 4,000 troops) and the battalion (600 troops). The book is not, therefore, primarily concerned with how governments, the North Atlantic Council, the European Council or the diverse ministries of defence decide upon defence policy and strategy. That is a crucial and deeply interesting topic which other international relations and security studies scholars have investigated at length (Kaplan 2004; Michta 2006; Sloan 2003; Sperling 1999; Yost 2000a, 2000b). Rather, this study is interested in how Europe's forces currently conceptualise, plan, command and train for military operations, especially in Afghanistan. These changes are of potentially historic importance. They seem to imply the supersession of the mass army by smaller, professional forces, not entirely dissimilar to the small mercenary armies which were evident in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, before the first levée en masse in France in 1793 (Luttwak 1995).[8]

[8] This book does not examine the rise of private military companies (Avant 2005; Singer 2003; Smith 2004), although their importance to military transformation is recognised. It

Critically, as the Cologne Declaration emphasised, Europe's forces are being turned into deployable reaction forces, capable of rapid intervention in regions of ethnic and religious conflict and state failure. Accordingly, this study focuses on Europe's reaction forces at the operational and tactical levels; it investigates selected military headquarters and intervention brigades. There are, however, inherent problems with such an approach. Rapid reaction forces are unusual and distinctive formations in Europe today. They are privileged in terms of personnel, resourcing and training. Indeed, the appearance of rapid reaction forces in Europe has led to under-investment in other forces. In some cases, the emergence of a two-tier military is observable in Europe; focused investment in reaction forces has led to under-investment in regular troops. The development of rapid reaction forces can in no way be taken as indicative of all aspects of military transformation in Europe today. Those differences are recognised, but this study does not pretend to analyse what has happened to less deployable forces. Their experiences are not unimportant and others (e.g., Forster *et al.* 1999) have begun to analyse their predicament in Central and Eastern Europe. There is no implication intended here that European military transformation is defined only by the emergence of rapid reaction forces. However, precisely because rapid reaction forces have been prioritised in defence policy, they are necessarily at the forefront of military transformation. No story of military innovation today can ignore these forces. Consequently, they have been selected as the focus of this study.

The book, then, examines European rapid reaction forces at the operational and tactical levels; it is interested in headquarters and in brigades trained for and tasked with global intervention. Even then a further delimitation has been required. In order to achieve the necessary depth of interpretation, the book primarily focuses on changes within Britain, France and Germany (although, as will become clear, NATO is critical to current changes). The contribution of Italy, Spain and the smaller European nations is not disparaged; the Dutch, Swedish and Danish militaries are particularly interesting in the way they have reformed themselves. Deeply significant changes, which are consonant with those in Britain, France and Germany, can be identified. However, Britain, France and Germany are the major military powers of Europe which are necessarily at the forefront of current developments. The transformation

is simply impossible to analyse their appearance and potential impact on Europe's military in the context of this study. In addition, with the exception of Britain, their impact is currently relatively small on European military operations. The Bundeswehr has outsourced uniform production and some other peripheral services, but in both Germany and France the armed forces have remained overwhelmingly the preserve of the state.

of their armed forces are likely to be the most significant for Europe and, indeed, reforms in these major countries are driving adaptations in the other smaller European nations. This book focuses on the appearance of new corps level 'operational' headquarters in Britain, France and Germany (and NATO), which plan and command current operations especially in Afghanistan and the Balkans. These headquarters constitute a critical organisational transformation, which also provides the institutional framework for further developments especially at the tactical level. At the tactical level, this book examines the appearance of selected reaction brigades, which have featured prominently in recent operations, in Britain, France and Germany.

There is one further qualification. This book is concerned almost exclusively with ground forces: with armies (and marines). There are reasons for focusing almost exclusively on land forces. Although naval and air forces remain important on operations today and they are themselves undergoing interesting and important adaptations, their performance is not decisive to the outcome of current missions. Europe's land forces, especially the identified rapid reaction brigades which spearhead Europe's military endeavours, will play the critical role. Air and naval forces provide vital support for these deployed brigades, but it is the brigades themselves which will finally determine whether Europe's current military operations are successful. Since the outcome of the campaign in Afghanistan is likely to define European military posture in the second and third decades of this century, their strategic importance recommends them as the primary object of investigation. They are at the heart of European military transformation.

The research into these distinctive military institutions involved three techniques: archival work on primary sources, principally military 'doctrine' (the formal published statements of military concepts, practices and procedure); interviews; and fieldwork observation. Military doctrine, as a written description of existing practice, has always been important to the armed forces. However, in the last decades, there has been a notable expansion of doctrine-writing and publication. As the armed forces have sought to transform themselves in the light of the new mission, it has been increasingly important for them to agree upon and articulate new procedures in order to maintain organisational unity and to justify governmental investment in them. At the same time, as national forces have had to work with each other ever more closely, doctrine has been a means of trying to co-ordinate and unify military reform between allies. Doctrine is, therefore, a major element of military reform in itself and constitutes a lucrative source for investigating European transformations.

Nevertheless, although doctrine is a useful source, alone it is inadequate. It is often easy to misinterpret what doctrine means in practice, especially as a civilian observer. Moreover, there is an inevitable gap between published doctrine and stated practice. The application of doctrine always differs from the formal statement of practice. Consequently, it is necessary to triangulate doctrine with other methods of collection. To this end, the research described here used a series of interviews with members of the armed forces and periods of fieldwork observation and visits. The research involved formal interviews or focus groups with 234 officers up to the rank of four-star general, although the views and experiences of many more military personnel including privates and marines were also recorded. The interviews were open-ended, allowing interviewees to explain their perspective on military transformation and the central reforms that the organisation of which they were part or which they commanded were enacting. Typically, interviews were conducted as part of a longer research visit, which involved observation of training, exercises or operations. This included visits to selected British, French, German, NATO and EU staff colleges,[9] operational headquarters[10] and rapid reaction brigades.[11] In all, I spent 135 days at these institutions.

Although the original plan was to research all three militaries equally, the reality proved different. I gained excellent access to EU and NATO HQs, but entry to the French and German militaries was not easy. Questions of national security, confidentiality and, potentially in some cases, institutional defensiveness arose. I was consequently able to do fieldwork at French and German staff colleges, but not their operational headquarters and brigades. I was limited to visits and interviews with personnel in these headquarters and brigades. In Britain, by contrast, I was given open access to military formations, watching troops and headquarters training, on exercise and on operations in Basra and Kabul. The result was that while the material from Germany and France was adequate, it was not as dense or extensive as the British material. Consequently, it was necessary for the British studies to predominate, using France and Germany as avowedly supporting cases. The

[9] Collège interarmées de défense, the Joint Services Command and Staff College, Führungsakademie, NATO School.

[10] The Allied Rapid Reaction Corps both in Rheindalen and, as ISAF IX, in Kabul, the Permanent Joint Headquarters, the Multinational Brigade (South East) Iraq in Basra, Centre de planification et de conduite des opérations, Einsatzführungskommando, Allied Command Operations, Allied Command Transformation, Joint Forces Command Brunssum, EUFOR Headquarters, Sarajevo and the EU Military Staff Brussels.

[11] 3 Commando Brigade, 16 Air Assault Brigade, 9 brigade légère blindée de marine, Division Spezielle Operationen.

distinctiveness of the British case is always recognised in the study, but the French and German studies are used to show that, while national differences remain, the general trajectory of institutional change in Europe is similar. All three militaries are converging on a broadly shared organisational model, while common concepts and practices are being instituted so that operational headquarters and rapid reaction brigades can co-operate with each other. NATO plays an important role in the research, providing an institutional framework which has mediated and co-ordinated changes within each nation.

There has been extensive discussion about the decline of the mass army in the late twentieth century, a reduction which has been described as down-sizing (Dandeker 1994; Haltiner 1998; Kelleher 1978; Manigart 2003: 331; Martin 1977; Shaw 1991; Van Doorn 1968). This book claims that the armed forces today are not so much shrinking as concentrating. They are, indeed, smaller than they have been for decades but, in some ways, they are more capable than their mass army forebears. The professional expertise of the forces across both combat and support roles is being intensified. It is here that rapid reaction forces are particularly important. They are the forces that have been at the forefront of this process of concentration. Defence resources, which have declined in general, have been focused on these emergent forces so that, while the armed forces as a whole have contracted, these privileged formations have expanded in size, capability and strategic significance.

In their study of the 'postmodern military', Charles Moskos *et al.* (2000: 2) claimed that one of the defining features of the armed forces today is the development of multinational and international forces. The process of 'multinationalisation' is central to this book. Europe's armed forces are co-operating with each other ever more closely, and at an ever lower tactical level, than would have been conceivable during the Cold War. Moskos uses the terms multinational or international to describe these emergent cross-border interactions. In this book, I have preferred to use the term 'transnational' rather than multinational. Military forces are not merging across borders to create supranational military formations, least of all a European army. Nation-states maintain their authority over their forces; indeed, in many cases, they have re-asserted their sovereignty over their troops. However, rapid reaction forces in each county, as concentrated nodes of national military capability, are interacting with each other more closely across borders which continue to exist. A thickening *transnational* military network is appearing in Europe between these condensations of national power. The interactions between national forces are sanctioned by the state, but they have transcended the level of intercourse which might be termed international. National borders have become porous and interactions

between rapid reaction forces occur, especially in-theatre, independently of specific state direction (once states have sanctioned their participation). Rapid reaction forces are actively seeking to learn and develop together in a mutually supporting network. A transnational network is identifiable. The nation remains a critical political framework for the armed forces even though these forces are increasingly incorporated into a dense and complex web of relations which exceed national borders. Indeed, the problems of access which I encountered in France and Germany were evidence of this transnationalisation. Europe's militaries are converging on common organisational models and shared forms of practice, but national borders, sovereignty and differences remain. These borders are precisely those which I encountered as I embarked on the research, preventing the possibility of dense fieldwork research in France and Germany which the British military were willing to grant to a British national.

The fundamental dynamic of European military transformation today described here involves a simultaneous process of concentration and transnationalisation. It seems likely that in the coming decade this trajectory will continue and, indeed, deepen so that by 2020 Europe's armed forces will be even smaller than they are now, but they will also be more professional and capable, having developed deeper co-operative links with each other. However, caution needs to be exercised here. The process of concentration and transnationalisation has engendered huge frictions at the domestic levels within the armed forces and internationally between European militaries. This friction cannot be ignored. Moreover, as I will discuss in the final chapter of the book, the future of the armed forces is uncertain and the processes of transnationalisation and concentration are reversible. While it seems inconceivable that Europe could return to the mass armies of the twentieth century, the current path of reform could be broken by a number of historical contingencies and specifically by defeat in Afghanistan. The military could suffer a major retrenchment in budget, status and mission leading to a reversal, especially of the process of transnationalisation and a move away from highly resourced rapid reaction forces. While this book cannot predict precisely what will happen in Afghanistan, it does seek to explain the current trajectory of change and suggests that the pattern of reform which is now underway is likely to continue into the next decade.

The research focus

In 1957, Samuel Huntington published *The Soldier and The State* (Huntington 1957); this was followed three years later by Morris Janowitz's *Professional Soldier* ([1960] 1981), which explored many of