



Introducing Change in Public Service Organizations under Austerity: The Complex Case of the Governance of the Defence in the United Kingdom

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Introducing, managing, and sustaining change in public service organizations is challenging for policy makers to implement and for scholars to theorize. In 2010, the U.K. Government introduced policy changes to help bring down the national deficit. The executive's planned reforms aimed to deliver a so-called battle-winning military force, a smaller and more professional Ministry of Defence, and an affordable overall defence organization. The article borrows from theories of management and public policy to help enlighten our understanding of change under New Public Management and governance approaches. The article's central claim is that the U.K. Government sought to correct cost-efficiency processes in public service organizations trying to reshape organizational and managerial structures dependent on many internal and external pressures. The article examines the executive's purpose in developing a need for change and the ways to implement it. I question whether the U.K. Government's prescriptive and hierarchical approach to organizational change in public administration is sustainable in the long term.

Keywords: New Public Management, Governance, Planned and Emergent Change, United Kingdom, Coalition Government, Public Administration, Policy Making, Defence Sector, Reforms, Public Policy, Public Service Organizations.

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Introducción del cambio en las organizaciones de servicio público bajo austeridad: el caso complejo de la gobernanza de la defensa en el Reino Unido

Introducir, gestionar y mantener el cambio en las organizaciones de servicio público es un desafío para los encargados de formular políticas y para que los académicos teoricen. En 2010, el gobierno del Reino Unido introdujo cambios en las políticas para ayudar a reducir el déficit nacional. Las reformas planificadas del ejecutivo tenían como objetivo entregar una fuerza militar llamada ganadora de batalla; un ministerio de defensa más pequeño y profesional; y una organización de defensa general asequible. El artículo toma prestado de las teorías de gestión y políticas públicas para ayudar a aclarar nuestra comprensión del cambio bajo la Nueva Gestión Pública y los enfoques de gobernanza. La afirmación central del artículo es que el gobierno del Reino Unido buscó corregir los procesos de costo / eficiencia en las organizaciones de servicio público que intentaban remodelar las estructuras organizativas y gerenciales que dependen de muchas presiones internas y externas. El artículo examina el propósito del ejecutivo para desarrollar una necesidad de cambio y las formas de implementarlo. Me pregunto si el enfoque prescriptivo y jerárquico del gobierno del Reino Unido para el cambio organizacional en la administración pública es sostenible a largo plazo.

Palabras Clave: Reino Unido, Nueva administración pública, Gobernanza, Cambio planificado y emergente, Gobierno de coalición, Administración Pública, Elaboración de políticas, Sector de defensa, Reformas, Política pública, Organizaciones de servicio público.

紧缩背景下的公共服务机构变革：英国国防治理的复杂案例

就在公共服务机构中引入、管理、维持变革而言，不论是决策者对此进行实施，还是学者对此进行理论建构，都具有挑战性。2010年，英国政府引入政策变革，帮助减少国家赤字。行政部门所规划的改革致力提供一个所谓的打胜仗军事力量；一个相对较小但更专业的国防部；以及一个可负担的全面国防机构。本文借助管理和公共政策方面的理论，帮助启发我们对新公共管理和治理措施下的变

革的理解。本文的中心主张是，英国政府试图纠正公共服务机构中的成本/效率过程，在许多内外部压力影响下试图重新打造组织架构和管理架构。本文检验了行政部门提出变革需求背后的目的以及落实变革的方法。英国政府对公共管理中的组织变革所提出的指定性、按等级划分的措施从长期看是否是可持续的，我对此提出疑问。

关键词: 英国, 新公共管理, 治理, 规划性变革与新兴变革, 联盟政府, 公共管理, 决策, 国防部, 改革, 公共政策, 公共服务机构.

Governments balancing their budgets in a period of fiscal austerity are faced with the problems of managing delivery demands while trying to cut back the rising burden of expensive public services (Hunt 2011; McTaggart and O’Flynn 2015; Solar and Smith 2020a, 2020b). During the first half of the 2010s, for example, Western industrialized nations sought to scale down the size of defence saving on personnel, civilian workforce, equipment, and capabilities, while proposing new ways of managing the sector during austerity (see Dorman, Uttley, and Wilkinson 2016; *The Economist* 2017; Taylor 2012). In Australia, the central government launched Project Suakin after years of inertia, to create a more flexible and adaptable defence, seeking “maximum efficiency” in the workforce (Latham and Sawyer 2014). In the United States, Barack Obama froze military procurement spending across fiscal budgets and assigned a series of crosscutting reforms. In Canada, the government introduced a reduction of around 10 percent in the defence budget and stripped the military of their role in acquisition programs (Leuprecht and Sokolsky 2015). Worldwide, radical restructuring was greeted with skepticism by observers who suggested more modest cuts and gradual changes to the organizational management of defence. Post-Cold War budget reductions did not affect, however, all advanced economies equally—with some cases increasing their overall defence expenditure as a percentage of their GDP, for example, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway (Chalmers 2010; Layton 2015; O’Hanlon 2013).

In the United Kingdom, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government (2010-15) introduced a series of austerity-driven policies to reverse the fiscal deficit. These cuts affected a vast range of public service organizations in the nonprotected areas of government spending, including national security. It should be said, however, that cuts to the defence sector were less than to other nonring-fenced departments. Prime Minister David Cameron launched the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) in 2010, arguing for three main pillars to support an austere defence: a smaller “battle-winning” military; a leaner Ministry of Defence (MoD); and, overall, more affordable defence governance (HM Government 2010). In light of such fiscal restraint, the defence sector was pushed to recalibrate and downsize operational conditions in the war on Afghanistan, their NATO commitments, and the “special relationship” with the United States (Chalmers 2010; Conley 2010; Foreman 2014; Gannon 2014).

The decline in the defence budget since then has been around 8 percent. As a result, core defence institutions (MoD, Army, Navy, and Air Force) made almost 30,000 armed forces posts redundant. They withdrew major military equipment such as jet fighters, tanks, artillery holdings, frigates, and an aircraft carrier. The private defence industry lost contracts on some significant investments in patrol and attack aircraft. Cameron's Government and the succeeding led by Theresa May (2016-19) reduced at least 25 percent of the MoD's running costs.

Scholars working in the affairs of strategic and foreign policy have since emphasized the challenges inherited by the SDSR and its updated version launched in 2015 (Dorman 2010; Dorman, Uttley, and Wilkinson 2016; Hammerstad and Boas 2015; Ritchie 2011; Taylor 2012). Yet, less attention has been put on other equally relevant aspects of modern governance, especially after retrospectively viewing the government's prescriptive changes for the defence sector. As Archuleta (2016, 51) argued, "while international relations purists and policy studies sceptics may be content with this status quo, a public policy approach to defence and national security questions is long overdue in the field."

The article aimed to fill that gap and explore the United Kingdom's top-down model for change based on the SDSR. In 2010, the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the SDSR were separate policy documents, mostly under the wing of the MoD; however—and because of the austerity program—the Treasury had an unprecedented involvement in the SDSR. It was only in 2015 that the NSS and the SDSR were brought together by the Cabinet Office and supervised by the National Security Council (NSC). The article argues that change strategies from the executive's point of view tend to be seen as formal, rational, and preplanned processes with a focus on implementing and responding to change through a deliberate strategy. This perspective, though, tends to cut out of the picture the messy, less rational, and emergent processes by which change is created and given form. The article's central claim argues that the government's austerity reforms sought to correct cost-efficiency processes in a way similar to how change is enforced upon private organizations. Under financial constraints, the latter are said to be more flexible to accommodate organizational change in areas of management, processes, and staffing (Andersen 2010; Hodge 2016). Public service organizations, however, are rigid structures with organizational and managerial patterns dependent on many internal and external pressures, including corporate culture, social obligations, legislatures, transparency measures, regulation, overseeing bodies, and public accountability (Burnes 2009; Thompson 2000).

To address change, the article identifies a set of political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental drivers that have conditioned change in the defence sector, enlightening the public-private distinction. Changes in the armed forces left the MoD and the armed services demoralized and unsure of the way that the pillars of the SDSR were to be executed (see Kirkup 2010). This grim environment begs the question as to whether the government's proposed changes

were feasible, and also if they were adequately envisioned. As was later evidenced, in 2015, the executive recoiled and conditioned some of its proposals to critical junctures (such as the General Election, and then Brexit), concealing its capacity to manage and lead change in a complex strategic policy-making scenario.

In the article, change is understood as being nonlinear and not an isolated event. Instead, change is open-ended, cumulative, and unpredictable—with a steady learning from success and failure from small actions with large consequences (see Burnes 2009, 362). Change is context based and situational. The article first reviews change in the public sector and some elements of the New Public Management (NPM) approach. Later, it delivers an analysis of some drivers of change relevant to the SDSR. I then present a discussion based on the theories introduced from the management literature, including the *planned* and *emergent* approaches for understanding change in public organizations (Burnes 2004a, 2004b; Kickert 2010; Sminia and Van Nistelrooij 2006). The planned approach views change as the result of a process that is hierarchical, authoritative, and set through the planning and identifying goals. Meanwhile, the emergent approach assumes change as being external to the control of organizations, leading to accommodation processes that are participative and encourage innovation (Osborne and Brown 2005). To conclude, the article debates how government's disruptive changes to defence policy making have lived up to the events.

Defence Governance and Post-New Public Management

The advanced democracies have expedited austerity processes that include the cutting of workforces and policy programs (Fernández and Wise 2010; Meijer 2014; Van der Voet and Vermeeren 2017). The ongoing wave of budget strictness and public sector reform usually rings back to NPM approaches to modern governance that, since the 1980s, have influenced public policy and change in many different ways. In Great Britain, for instance, NPM imprinted a managerial approach on defence that sought for performance measure indicators and “customer” satisfaction for public benefit (Carr 2001; Lonsdale 2009). From the 1970s, the Conservative Party and the Thatcher Government put faith in “reducing the role of the state in the delivery of public services and increasing the marketization of all sectors of society” (Smith 2015, 64). A second wave of this marketization of the public services hit governments’ defence expenses to claim more value for money, making the privatization of certain services more visible (i.e., private contractors and alliances with technology and human resources companies). From the late 1990s, the defence sector sought for greater decentralization and lesser bureaucratization, drifting away from traditional public administration systems that had ruled over the sector during the Cold War (Bishop 1995; Sweetman 1990). Decentralization, nevertheless, did not occur until the adoption of various ministerial reforms was pushed forward by

the Conservative-Liberal coalition. Defence's corporate interests grew in size, reaching a peak during the New Labour era under Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown (Institute for Fiscal Studies 2015). Political consensus at the turn of the century allowed for the model to carry on, with the hope of maintaining Britain's foreign and defence capabilities (Richards and Smith 2002). Civilians at the MoD did gain more managerial control, but meanwhile, the armed forces budget kept rising (De Castella 2015; Martin 2009).

The coalition came to power with the idea that British Government had entered a process of transformation into a more "balanced and stronger" economy, with other stakeholders, such as industry, playing a contributing role regarding public policy objectives (Ministry of Defence 2010f). The authorities were keen to say that, "while we cannot provide certainty in defence in an unstable world, we can provide better management of unpredictability to enable better management and investment planning for both the military and industry" (Ministry of Defence 2010f). The jump to a more recent post-NPM scenario evidenced at the turn of the century, and branded by some authors as new public governance, has in a sense pushed governments into more transparent and accountable forms of governing (Hyndman and Liguori 2016).

Theoretically, governing military and security bodies, and thus leading and managing change, was rooted in the notion that defence governance happens through negotiation, participation, and consensus among stakeholders in how to deliver the executive's polity agenda. The trouble is that in the defence sector, hierarchies can hinder change, due to, among other factors, national security measures being imposed over many of the tasks given to the overly bureaucratic defence organizations (Phillips 2012; Taylor 2012). Against this background, governments have opened a window for change and management that is both unpredictable and undefined.

NPM, as the new orthodoxy of public service, was supported domestically by governments and by global organizations that transfer policy from country to country. One of the pillars to drive policy change and manage it has survived ongoing economic uncertainty in light of one core premise: there is an ideological commitment to economic competition as a model that achieves efficiency in free markets. However, the article argues that change is different for each public sector organization despite our understanding of universal principles of governance under NPM (see Hood and Dixon 2016; Hyndman and Lapsley 2016). The ongoing waves of public service reform based on managerial approaches, the marketization of public services, and the creation of policy networks responsive to community has led NPM to a change from public administration to public management. Under the latter, public service organizations are understood to be proactive and capable of anticipating strategic calculation about change and their relationship with their stakeholders (Solar and Smith 2020a, 2020b).

In the policy management literature, the planned and emergent approaches to change emphasize the uncertainty brought about by the incoming waves of public

governance. The planned approach tries to avoid uncertainty by suggesting that authorities identify what is required to enforce change in public organizations; meanwhile, a vision taken from the emergent stream tries to organize change reacting to uncertainty; this happens by accommodating and preparing public service organizations for an environment of constant adaptation. For example, in Kurt Lewin's (1997) exploration of the planned approach, public institutions are identified as reticent to change because they are forces that sustain the *status quo*. Various competing interests prevent change because it is normal for these intra and extra institutional forces to be of similar strength, dealing in great detail with stable governance conditions. Change will happen, nevertheless, as one of these forces start to shift, creating new power balances within the field. In 2010, for example—and only five months after assuming office—the government lined up its diagnostic of the “present” with that of a “desired future state” for the defence. This approach is closer to the planned understanding of leading and managing change. Although authors in the field have found no consensus, both the planned and the emergent perspectives form part of a spectrum between *deterministic* ways of understanding change, and those that emphasize *voluntarists* notions of change. Determinists argue that the environment is an unpredictable force of change and can form the background within which a single public service organization, or a set, may operate. Voluntarists are less contextually dependent and put more explanatory power on the decision making of societal members, in particular those with leading skills (Hughes 2010). This managerial approach is said to be driven by specific triggers of change.

The article uses process tracing to give evidence of the political and economic governance of defence and to evaluate possible explanatory claims examining, in this case, actions taken by policy makers. Process tracing allows analyzing trajectories of change describing episodes, sequences, and building blocks often understood as a temporal concatenation of events or phenomena (Collier 2011). Through this approach, the article seeks to untangle complex processes into crucial junctures of change in defence polity. Reconstructing the sequence of events and how the actors involved in the governance of defence behaved will help shed light on observable mechanism of change (González-Ocantos and LaPorte 2019). Any exercise on process tracing requires disintegration and, thus, recognizing and interpreting certain events from a larger scale of interconnected events (Tilly 2001). The article presents a sample of such events rather than a big chunk of history. It collects original data from different sources (policy papers, speeches, press articles, official reports, among other forms of primary data) to document various aspects of the theoretical claim and to fill possible evidentiary gaps and missingness. The primary data are used to explain events as described by an eyewitness to the policy event or someone who experienced the event (Persaud and Salkind 2012). In this case, primary data sources and primary sources will prove information that is closest to the study of governance and change. The contextual knowledge that follows is a calibrated effort to shed light on credible empirical narratives of change.

When examining the sequence of these drivers of organizational change one should assume that there is no consensus on why organizations change; however, the key is on acknowledging competing explanations of determinist (environment) versus voluntarist (societal) nature. In such a sense, triggers of change can be identified as of a political (i.e., elections, NPM, state reform, regionalization), economic (i.e., global economy, recession, austerity, marketization, trade), social (i.e., aging, social inclusion, minorities), technological (i.e., e-government, IT innovation), legal (i.e., constitution, legislation), and environmental nature (i.e., natural disasters, global warming). As well, they respond to national, regional, and local scales of governance (Osborne and Brown 2005). The specific analysis of these drivers of change (or PESTLE) will be explored next.

Political

Maybe one of the essential factors for the government's planned change for the defence lay in the desire to move away from the previous Labour leadership of the military. The main points, argued by David Cameron's Government, for rapidly pushing forward the SDSR can be identified as follows:

- The mismanagement of the defence was blamed on the previous Labour Government.
- Even if defence spending kept pace with inflation, the government faced a deficit of many billions of pounds over the life of parliament and more over the next decade.
- It was assumed that the cost of successive generations of equipment would continue to rise at above the rate of inflation.
- Contractual and structural commitments on personnel and equipment meant that the budget was very heavily committed for each of the next four years, severely limiting the government's ability to maneuver.
- Labour's solution to all this was to delay projects, increasing long-term costs, and to continue to rely on an Strategic Defence Review (SDR) long past its sell-by date.
- The problem was structural, so the response also had to be structural to put defence on a stable footing. The MoD itself had to face reform.
- The government intended to reorganize the whole organization around three pillars: first, strategy and policy; second, armed forces; and third, procurement and estates.
- The authorities wanted to create a more efficient and leaner center where everyone knew what they were responsible for and to whom they were accountable.
- Major reform of our procurement practices was to be accompanied by a number of industrial consultations outlined to Parliament.
- While the SDSR was resource informed, it was said to be policy led (adapted from Ministry of Defence 2010b).

On that basis, the executive's planned program established the following guidelines as the three core principles of the SDSR:

- **Relevance:** Defence posture and capabilities should be relevant to the world we live in, dispensing with much of the Cold War legacy.
- **Realism:** We cannot insure against every imaginable risk so we should decide which risks we are willing to take.
- **Responsibility:** the nation has a duty to support our service personnel. We are determined to insure they have what they need to do what we ask of them, and that they and their families are looked after properly (Ministry of Defence 2010a).

The changes for the defence were to be only considered successful if a coherent new commitment to austerity politics was enforced across the executive branch, with a focus on nonprotected budget areas. Government sought a collective desire to align strategy and capabilities. However, this effort was continually thwarted. Early on, Sir David Richards, Chief of Defence Staff (a position nominated by the MoD and approved by the prime minister), praised the SDSR. In November 2010, Richards noted that the SDSR had come to ensure “transformation” and provide the military with direction. He even quoted Winston Churchill, saying “to improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often” (Richards 2010).

However, a document prepared by military officers and senior MoD officials, and entitled “SDSR Lesson Identified,” described the proposed reforms as being carried out too quickly and without proper advice. They blamed the direction taken by the recently created NSC in enforcing defence cuts. The government then promptly undermined the document, criticizing its opportunism and lack of authority. However, in a letter revealed by the media in late 2010, the Secretary of Defence, Liam Fox, had warned David Cameron of the consequences of “draconian” defence cuts (Kirkup 2010). With the SDSR already in the making and the fear of miscalculating cuts to defence ever-present, the government went ahead to enforce its full agenda of change.

Economical

When they were the opposition, the Conservative Party estimated the defence budget deficit at £39 billion. However, once in government, and considering the cost that the SDSR brought, the sum peaked to £55 billion. The government had not only to clear that debt but also reduce the budget. The SDSR received cross-sector political revision through a spending evaluation; this was part of a more holistic discussion where it was agreed to minimize governmental debt from 11 to 1.1 percent of the GDP. The coalition argued that the Cabinet Office, the NSC, and the Home Office had worked together to make the SDSR the “most thorough” review of defence since a previous SDR launched by New Labour in 1998. Through the creation of the NSC, the coalition shifted responsibility from the MoD to the Cabinet Office. The NSC’s primary purpose is to serve as “the main forum for collective discussion of the government’s objectives for national security and about how best to deliver them in the current financial climate”

(HM Government 2018). Through the NSC, the prime minister and the Cabinet Office ensure that ministers “consider national security in the round and in a strategic way” and implement matters of the SDSR and the NSS, minding for issues funded by cross-government expenditure (HM Government 2018).

Britain’s defence sector is guided by three documents: the Defence Review (overseeing public expenditure), the NSS (outlining the MoD’s approach to the risk of attack), and the SDSR. The coalition proposed the Defence Review as a “financial template” for which to consider budgets for their services. The review then established a series of categories upon which a methodology was coined, including items on cost-efficiency and their financial, operational, and capability implications. In a later interview, Fox put it this way:

[There were] a huge number of projects that we looked at against that—a lot of options inside each one, hundreds and hundreds of them. It took us a long time, but the reason that we did it that way, was I wanted to create a paper trail for future Defence Reviews so that people could see why we took decisions and what information we were looking at when we took that decision. Whether or not that is carried through to this Defence Review, not my issue or call. But I imagine the Defence Select Committee will be very interested in whether the methodology was continued. (Institute for Government 2015)

Once the economic assessment was on its way, Fox described it “the absolute mother of horrors of a spending review” as each service was asked what could be done with the institutions to lose 10 or 20 percent of their budgets (BBC 2010). Subsequent analyses categorized the prospect of the service cuts as a small “vigilant” capability, a mid-sized “adaptable” military, or a mostly unchanged “committed” force (The Economist 2010). Only in mid-2012, did a new defence chief, Phillip Hammond, announce that only through “tough,” “necessary,” and “radical” reform, had the black hole in the defence budget been eliminated. Balancing the program thus meant moving ahead with the planned changes, taking special consideration in limiting the number and roles of MoD ministers, better management of financial IT services, and more responsibility for the budgets of the armed services (Levene 2011).

Social

Various waves of redundancy schemes affected personnel in combat operations as well as those in administrative roles. Some social conditions allowed the redundancies to take place, backed by the government’s belief that service leavers had a solid chance of finding jobs as civilians. The coalition-planned strategy suggested that around 85 percent of those made redundant were employed within six months of leaving defence institutions (HM Government 2013). The government then moved on to enforce redundancies, minimizing the force by decreasing the number of recruits and not replacing those who

left. The MoD also proposed a pension scheme that rewarded those leaving the armed forces at 40 if they had been enrolled for a fixed number of years. Other social groups, such as civilian personnel, saw a drastic reduction in numbers. By April 1, 2010, MoD data accounted for 85,850 of the civilian population. The expected reduction established in the SDSR was met after a decrease of 28,990 civilians by October 2015 (or 33.8 percent). Further cuts were made, and a planned reduction of another 30 percent was predicted by 2020. As of October 2017, MoD civilian personnel totaled 57,050.

Technological

Despite the financial urgency, more money was allocated in the military workforce and equipment across the services. This became visible in 2013 when the SDSR was said to be in positive numbers. As explained by the government, the renegotiation of contracts with industry and the reform of procurement would allow for the purchasing of “state-of-the-art equipment worth £160 billion” over a decade (Hammond 2013). The move took many observers by surprise as the government was now backing the purchase of major military programs including new aircraft carriers, submarines, destroyers, and armored vehicles. The MoD quickly announced the military strategy entitled “Future Force 2020” and the government moved forward with the SDSR on the basis that new technological elements were needed in the areas of intelligence, surveillance, cyber warfare, and unmanned technologies, not as Cameron (2014) mentioned, for “tanks in the European mainland.” The prime minister argued that the previous economic restraint showed “that our prudence is paying off. The fact is we are only in a position to make these investments because we have been resolute in tackling the deficit, a key part of our long-term economic plan” (Cameron 2014).

Legal

The wide-ranging defence reform program of the SDSR was driven by a legal scenario that allowed the government to plan and enforce change around two main areas. For example, through the Defence Reform Act, which achieved Royal Assent in 2014, the government decided to boost legislation to improve the procurement of defence equipment and strengthen the reserve forces. The MoD’s “Transforming Defence” program was meant to deliver ways for a single source procurement to make significant savings for the department, while also trying to ensure a more transparent system (Hambleton, Holder, and Kirkpatrick 2013). The government extended its powers to call out for reservists to join regular forces when needed. A further white paper entitled “Future Reserves 2020: Delivering the Nation’s Security Together,” reemphasized the reservists’ contribution to defence and national security (Ministry of Defence 2012); this followed the 2015 SDSR and the Future Force 2020, which had by then turned into “strategy-oriented” schemes (Edmunds *et al.* 2016).

In conclusion, the drivers for the 2010-15 changes to the defence sector cannot be reduced to single elements. Instead, they work best when seen as the combination of multifactored causations and nonhierarchical developments complementing each other. The next section returns to a few key ideas from the management and public policy literature to discuss how these changes affected the government's planned strategy.

A "Break of Mindset"

Planned change strategies were popular in the 1980s due to the work of management consultants who advocated for a one-size-fits-all type of approaches to change in private institutions. Emergent change, on the other side, turned popular as more dynamic environments for public and private organizations emerged, and the focus became on the struggles within and in their environment. Approaching change was then understood as a consensus-building exercise in which reform was a continuous, unpredictable, and highly political phenomenon. Managers and leaders became highly essential, this time through a multidimensional and horizontal performance point of view against the previously popular top-down models. In this section, the article discusses how individuals can take the responsibility of being the change agent, whether as neutral or interested operators.

When the SDSR was launched in October 2010, it broke with a tradition of previous reviews that focused only on the security of the state. One of the critical agents, Secretary Liam Fox (2010), argued that the SDSR had been designed to "make a clean break from the military and political mindset of Cold War politics." The coalition government included new policy areas in the SDSR, namely counter-terrorism, international aid and diplomacy, border and cyber security, and homeland defence. The extent of the restructuring proved the coalition's ambitious plan to manage change. As Walker and Mills (2018, 4) put it, "to bring all the different strands of work together in a coherent, coordinated and effective manner, both the NSS and the SDSR acknowledged the need for strong leadership and guidance at the center of government" (see also Fitz-Gerald 2008).

Nevertheless, management and ownership within the defence reform became socially contested, more so, as the coalition set in motion its austerity program. The public, on the one side, recognized the importance of the cuts (which consequently empowered the executive); however, they also cared about cuts harming their living conditions and security (Clarke *et al.* 2013). For two other critical agents, David Cameron, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, the need to correct the books of public spending across was a priority for the government (HM Treasury 2010). Fox (2010) put it this way:

After 12 years without a defence review, over a period where our armed forces have been at times overstretched, with some current equipment overused and out of date, with legacy programs from the Cold War that are of less relevance today, and in a terrible economic and financial circumstances, we cannot afford to delay. But I want to be as open as I can about this backdrop because, to be frank, change is not an option, it is a necessity.

For more specialized players (i.e., high-level active military, retired personnel, journalists, practitioners, and academics), the coalition government faced limited policy choices as the radical processes of prescriptive and recipe-driven changes were enforced. Gearson and Gow (2010) believe that the SDSR was a blank canvas on which the executive could reconfigure relationships within government, across departments, and with Parliament (see also Phillips 2012; Savill 2011). It, thus, became essential for cross-sector accountability and responsibility to lead the changes proposed. In that vein, the SDSR “was portrayed as a unique opportunity to rebalance the defence priorities, commitments, and spending” (Walker and Mills 2018, 28).

Imposing Change: Planned or Processual?

In an era of post-NPM governance, change and management in public organizations is determined by various factors affecting different levels of governance, global, national, institutional, managerial, and technical (Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill 2001). What is common across scales, to a certain point, is that defence institutions appear to converge toward change reforms steered from the most senior authorities. The executive, for example, stated that the SDSR was a point of departure, not the end of the line. Liam Fox added, “The reality is that implementation of what we have set out will be no easy ride, there remain hard decisions to take, and there is no new money. So, if the penny has yet to drop, let it drop now” (Ministry of Defence 2010e).

The MoD set out its business plan with its top priorities including how to implement the SDSR; restructuring the armed forces and their capabilities; rebuilding the armed forces Covenant and developing the New Employment Model (see Ministry of Defence 2015); as well as, delivering the Defence Reform Unit’s review. For this, the MoD was to report progress every month against the so-called Structural Reform Plan. The Secretary of State for Defence and the Permanent Secretary were made accountable every quarter by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Minister for the Cabinet Office for delivery against the plan; meanwhile, the Director General of Finance was to be subject to a monthly review meeting with the Cabinet Office and Treasury. When the departmental business plan was published, Cabinet Minister Oliver Letwin noted:

Taken together, these plans will change the nature of government. They represent a power shift, taking power away from Whitehall and putting it

into the hands of people and communities; and a horizon shift, turning government's attention toward the long-term decisions that will equip Britain for sustainable social success and sustainable economic growth. (Ministry of Defence 2010d)

Can we take Letwin's position as an aspiration to change? Change agents provide coordination, direction, and sustainability, through devolving, subordinating, and acting themselves over change (Burnes 2009; Hughes 2010). However, they also "find themselves in complex and often changing networks of people, institutions, opportunities, and problems" (Carnall 2007, 154). Together with the SDSR came the need to reform the MoD, a strategy for which a Defence Reform Unit was set up, in charge of both structural changes (in terms of policy and strategy, the armed forces, and procurement and estates), and cultural changes (to bring forward a decentralized, devolving, and more accountable organization). Fox described the reform unit as "a heavy-hitting steering group of internal and external experts [who] will guide the hard thinking and challenge preconceptions" (Ministry of Defence 2010c). Lord Levene chaired the reform unit together with a committee of members from outside the MoD and supported by a civil service implementation team. The reform unit was also meant to work with the chief of defence staff and service chiefs "to find ways of giving greater devolution for the running of the services themselves" (Ministry of Defence 2010c). The government also wanted to reconsider the current senior rank structure across the services to match SDSR outcomes. Fox stated that "we cannot demand efficiency from the lower ranks while exempting those at the top" (Ministry of Defence 2010c).

Despite the coalition's desire to replace the old top-down system of targets and central micromanagement style, changes did not result as desired by the executive. Some observers saw early on that many of the SDSR aspects had been brought forward through limited negotiation or consultation with the parties involved—most notably, armed forces personnel. Most commentators agreed that the SDSR was too top-down and target-objective driven (see Dover and Phythian 2012).

In theory, the planned approach to change is said to be effective at depicting real-world processes of reform that are linear and respond to systematic behaviors. The effects on decision making and policy making brought about by the SDSR clearly showed that real-world change is complex, dynamic, and does not necessarily respond to a linear relationship between triggers of change and change outcomes. On the contrary, a processual understanding of change in both public and private organizations, linked to the emergent approach, would argue that change occurs at different levels where linear events are not clearly constructed (Kickert 2010; Pettigrew 1997). Moreover, if within the United Kingdom the whole purpose of NPM reform was to create a minimalist state (see Bevir, Rhodes, and Weller 2003), changes in the core structures would be easy as public institutions could be constricted for somewhat limited bureaucracies. For the defence sector, however, the move went the other way as

it grew in complexity, mushrooming into various administrative structures and organizational subcultures.

For some scholars, the orthodoxy of NPM has survived the test of time mostly because of its adaptability to economic uncertainty and greater ideological commitment to the efficiency of the free market (Osborne and Brown 2005). What is of concern here is how the defence sector approached change in light of the overlapping elements from NPM and the new public governance evidenced across the defence sector, for example, the overall performance measurement and cost-affordability notions for decision and policy making within the services. Theoretically, the post-NPM scenario meant that public services became more proactive and capable in the way they anticipated change. However, in the case of the defence sector, we see that a large, hierarchical, siloed, and fragmented set of public organizations do not necessarily react well to change proposed from the center when this ignores the politics of interrelated institutions and incremental change situations. In a sense, the principles of NPM have obscured the meaning of change within specific public policy sectors in favor of a universal understanding of public sector reform. Richardson (2018) suggested that our understanding of the British policy process is going back to a policy style in which so-called governance emphasis fades away to a more traditional Westminster model of governing (i.e., with less bargaining and consensus among interested groups). Isolating change can help us identify how leading change from the center has come to affect defence governance in this and other substantial ways.

Understanding Change

To reinforce the article's argument, this section brings forward explanations of why change closely relates to the context in which public service organizations operate. Contextual analysis is dependent on factors that are worth discussing because of timing and their multifactual nature (i.e., political, societal, and economic). The context of change is both internal and external and affected by past, present, and future. Critical perspectives would argue that the environment does not force change upon actors—but rather, actors work within the context and act to shape this context. Observers of institutional theories, for example, would argue that policy makers can copy and adapt change learned from other public organizations (see Hughes 2010, 65). Proponents of planned change would assume that change that is the result of a systematic process of scanning the environment and determining how an organization should change. Emergent change, however, is the results of actions thrust upon an organization that are outside of its control (Osborne and Brown 2005).

In one of the seminal NPM debates, Christopher Hood argued that public services tend to adapt to the “corporatization” of the public sector through greater emphasis on management methods that were measurable in performance

of success, just as corporations do (Hood 1991, 1995). Years later, Burnes (2009, 404-5) confirmed the tendency, asserting that “successive governments in the United Kingdom and elsewhere have put considerable pressure on their respective public sectors to deliver more cost-effective and more customer-responsive services.” In one way, the coalition’s cost-benefit approach to set change translated in the SDSR’s corporatization. The move was somehow rationalized by the government even before the Conservatives assumed office. While lecturing at a think tank in London in February 2010, Liam Fox said, “Make no mistake; we need a step change, not tinkering” (RUSI 2010). Because change in defence was mostly dependent on the coalition’s preconceived assumption of how the sector should look over the next few years, it is initially assumed that the emergent approach to change cannot explain much of the SDSR outcomes or the proposed changes.

On the contrary, it can be said that the government was working within a unique context (one marked by austerity) and acted to shape politics according to its reforming choices. The planned approach works well in hierarchic sectors where no significant cultural change is required for risk-averse public service organizations. Change imposed from the center tends to be prescriptive, meaning that change strategies are seen as formal, rational, and preplanned processes. In this view, the 2010 SDSR embodied the government’s desire to implement a defence reform through a deliberate strategy. Thus, the SDSR contained little space for messy, less rational, or “emergent” processes of change. Although, and as the changes went on, the overall defence transformation responded to other unpredicted events that caused some governmental U-turns (Chalmers 2010). For example, Cameron was hesitant to maintain defence spending at 2 percent of the GDP as identified in the SDSR while also meeting the deficit-reduction targets. However, after the 2015 General Election, Cameron finally subscribed the budget to NATO’s target level.

What is also debatable here is how throughout the afterlife of the SDSR, the government has adapted to the process of change. Lewin (1997) established that organizations can enter a three-step model of change where they start by unfreezing from inertia, move in the direction of desired change, and then refreeze/stabilize again as they sink into a new *status quo*. By applying this approach to the defence sector, it is reasonable to say that the first two stages were met as the defence sector was hit by changes that compelled a process of moving forward toward a new horizon. Yet, what is less clear is that by choosing a planned change strategy, a new equilibrium was found. The 2015 SDSR updated version evidenced a knowable end-stage; however, to the eyes of many commentators, it only gave continuity to the already established areas of main change: personnel reductions, revamping the MoD, and cost-cutting waste in the overall defence governance (see Dorman, Uttley, and Wilkinson 2016).

Theories of change and management emphasize the planned change model as a response to *processes* (methods used for change) and *phases* of change

(stages that organizations walk to achieve change). Planned change occurs as organizations pass through states of exploration, planning, action, and integration. Nevertheless, across these stages, public organizations would find that a planned approach to change hinders adjustment as there are so many pitfalls involved (Bullock and Batten 1985, quoted in Burnes 2009, 343): for instance, allowing change at the institutional level to be collaborative or jointly designed, democratic and participatory, bottom-down, and fit for environments of rapid change (Richards and Smith 2016). The central executive lacked a clear incremental strategy that would convey emphasis in clear steps, mainly as the SDSR affected not only individual services, but a whole group of public service institutions, part of the interrelated and system-wide defence sector (Cleary 2011). A more analytic perspective for understanding those processual changes occurring in defence is needed in this case.

Conclusion

This article provided an exploration of drivers affecting different levels and different aspects of change in public service organizations. It argued that the contextual factors that shape change in public organizations can be extensive, or, very localized. Theoretical approaches from the policy management literature can be ultimately analyzed in light of different levels; however, and more fundamentally, isolating change can help identify where NPM reform, austerity, and governance analytical approaches capture the dynamic capabilities of public organizations (see Lo 2018; Piening 2013). The importance of marrying these fields of study is that it encourages the overlap of different perceptions dealing with change as it puts under the scope processes and decisions that can favor or hinder innovation in complex and hierarchic organizations stressed by continuous change.

The United Kingdom's management of defence, as reviewed in the article, sets out a rocky road for dealing with change in at least two ways. First, the prescriptive and planned approach to change results is hard to pull off in a wholesome way. The SDSR reorientation seen in 2015 shed light on the iterative nature of "re-making" a strategic review to eventually reach fruitful ends. Not only did the policy world demand a more flexible and multiapproach to change, for instance, within the MoD reform, but, from an operations point of view, the ability to simultaneously put strain on the armed forces, for example, in Libya and Afghanistan (Dover and Phythian 2011), meant a dynamic process of political action and learning, that is, in terms of how to make the defence both leaner and more efficient at no extra cost.

From the NPM, governance, and organizational change literature, the article rescues the idea that public organization face turbulent environments that can change in unforeseen and unpredictable ways (see Boyne and Meier 2009). Prime Minister Theresa May added another layer of complexity to

managing policy change as her austerity measures further stressed defence structures and capabilities (Blackburn 2015). May's foundational layer for future military capability came hand in hand with an illusion of dynamic change, as opposed to more structured and hierarchical fiscal austerity plans. Tough decisions on managing the sector, as Lord Levene's annual defence form reported, have made the leadership flaws inherited from the NSS and SDSR more evident (Dorman, Uttley, and Wilkinson 2016). Also, the political origin of these top-down changes, as well as the need for change sustainability, has become quite difficult to identify (Cavanagh 2011). For instance, the proposed reforms included in the 2015 revised versions of the NSS and SDSR slimmed-down top-level decision making at the Defence Board level. The layers of senior management have thus seen a considerable reduction in size, as the Head Office also became involved, reduced by 25 percent, likewise, in the armed services, who have seen their powers carved at the top. The chief's senior structure, however, was reshaped to improve a lack of personal accountability and irresponsible decision making cascading from top-down leadership.

Still, other systemic issues remain, most notably, the cultural and political factors needed to sustain organizational and processual changes occurring inside defence institutions (Levene 2015). Because many outputs from the defence management are measured against savings, efficiency, and budget cuts, leading and managing change has tested the central government's ability to carry forward the intricate fiscal management of what Lord Levene referred to like the new model of defence management—one characterized by personal accountability, streamlined leadership, the prioritization of resources, and an overall defence policy network managed by both civilian and military stakeholders. Under these new conditions, leading and managing change should acknowledge the dynamism and decentralization of policy making, as opposed to planned and hierarchical reforms (see Howlett and Ramesh 2014; Peters 2018). Considering the intertwined factors driving today's security policy, one of the most active militaries in the world cannot disregard the eventful consequences of change.

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