



UKNDA DISCUSSION PAPER

The Carrot and the Stick: *Soft Power and Hard Power, Foreign Aid and Military Might*

By Fred Dupuy

The billions of pounds that flow from this country to others in the form of foreign aid are not only a sign of the UK's benevolence to the less well-off nations of the world but also a form of gaining (some might say purchasing) favour from the governments of the recipient nations. As the velvet hand of diplomacy, it is a very effective way of spreading British influence around the world – and in a manner that appeals to the moralistic and humanitarian element within our psyche.

When that soft approach fails, but British influence is still desired, or even required, then the mailed fist of diplomacy is called into effect. This may take the form of a subtle shifting of military assets, through the overt display of exercising forces to actual military intervention.

Between those two approaches there is a cross-over that is blurred but often takes the form of military assets being used to affect and enhance the process of aid to a foreign government and its citizens. There are parts of the world where political upheaval is threatened through insurgency and the UK provides military assistance to help the government, or governments, involved to maintain a situation where ordinary men and women can go about their lives in an orderly and law abiding way. The recently announced training mission to Jordan is only one such deployment. The stability that this assistance helps to maintain is probably the best form of aid possible in that it allows the local populace to help themselves. It could be argued therefore, that in such circumstances, military aid to a foreign government is in fact foreign aid in its purest form.

We are presently being told by the United Nations aid agencies that another famine is looming in the Horn of Africa. They acknowledge this as another potentially manmade disaster, brought about by warring factions within the area. My first exposure to requests for aid to the starving masses of Africa was in 1960 when I was an 11-year old schoolboy. For all the aid that has been poured into that continent in the decades since, we are still seeing starvation where political stability, of whatever ilk, would allow the population of that area to feed themselves. In many of those situations, military aid, possibly in a covert and limited fashion, would help to stabilise the situation and allow the growing and harvesting of crops so that food aid would not be required.

There are also other ways in which the military are called upon to help foreign administrations because of internal stress or natural disaster. In 2001 Hurricane Michelle ravaged the coastal areas of Honduras and Nicaragua. At the time, the then new, HMS Ocean was undergoing tropical proving trials in the Caribbean and was immediately on hand to help with her Sea King helicopters and her across the beach capability. The Navy were of course more than willing to help and they did so but that help incurred a financial cost. Fuel, airframe hours, time off task etc.; what is the operating day rate for a vessel like Ocean and her embarked systems; which agency paid for that intervention? It could not be construed as a defence of the realm but it surely was, as is all disaster relief out with the UK and her sovereign territories, a form of foreign aid. The aid administered by HMS Ocean was only one of many such interventions by UK forces to aid stricken communities that have occurred over the centuries and no doubt they will continue.

The Royal Navy maintains a permanent guard ship in the Caribbean to support the crown territories and other island states. There is no military threat there but there are smuggling operations, mostly drugs (normally a civilian policing task) and regular hurricanes interspersed with the odd volcanic eruption. This vessel is there in part for the defence of the UK's distant realm but it also gets involved in the support of communities that are not a part of the Sovereign territories, at which time she is administering foreign aid. What is the operating day rate for that vessel? The Navy also maintains what is termed a helicopter training vessel, RFA Argus, which is in fact a well-equipped hospital ship. This vessel is just as likely to be used in a civilian aid role as a military one. What is her day rate and who pays for her to be maintained and on standby?

Our defence forces (from all three services) are regularly deployed to assist foreign governments and their citizens. **Whichever way you wish to look at it, many of these deployments can only be considered as a form of foreign aid and it is about time that the budget for that, which, at the present time, has an excess of cash, should pay for them.** To this end the MOD should have readily to hand the charge-out rates for all their units, be they ships, aircraft, personnel and the systems required to support them. As with all commercial assets, this costing should include an element of the initial training costs, purchasing price, maintenance, crewing and the depreciation rates.

There is another operation in which our forces are used that is not a direct action for the defence of the UK. It is in the form of industrial advertising, where ship, aircraft and/or personnel are deployed, with equipment, to advertise the produce of British industry to a foreign power, in the hope that orders will follow. Who pays for that deployment and if it is an agency other than the MOD is it a realistic price? In his recent review to advise the UK government on their forthcoming shipbuilding strategy, Sir John Parker suggested that when the armed forces had to purchase British manufactured equipment at uneconomic market prices, in order to support the home industrial base, they should not be financially penalised. That ethos should hold true when existing military assets and manpower are used to enhance those interests.

Other government agencies charge for their services (the police, for instance, who charge for policing parades and large public events, and for providing outrider escorts for wide loads on Britain's roads). The defence budget is creaking under the strain of the demands being placed upon it. Where defence assets are used to assist the aims of other government agencies, those agencies should be made to reimburse the MOD. To this end realistic charge out rates should be developed and continuously updated so that the potential bill can be presented as soon as an asset is requested.

Several years ago, while serving as master of a commercial survey vessel in the offshore oil & gas industry, my ship was put 'off hire' for 0.3 hours (18 minutes) because a piece of equipment, essential to the task in hand, was not available. On that contract, as with many others like it, the vessel was hired on a day rate basis, or the proportion of a day down to 0.1 hours and she had to be available to carry out the contracting company's work to receive payment. I quote this incident to emphasise the lengths to which commercial companies go in order to maximise financial efficiency and remain solvent.

There has been comment from various quarters, not least HM Treasury, that the MOD needs to become more fiscally aware and commercially competent. If that is the way it has to be, then the armed forces should charge for their services when they are not involved in their core task of defending the realm.

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UKNDA Ltd, PO Box 819, Portsmouth PO1 9FF. Tel 023 9283 1728. Email secretary@uknda.org
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