

# Want to Buy a War? Britain's Ministry of Defence Wants to Sell You One

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

*The UK Ministry of Defence is worried; worried that the public have become 'risk averse' to the point that we won't want to go to war anymore; so worried that in November 2012 they wrote a report - *The Implications of Current Attitudes to Risk for the Joint Operational Concept* - made public today by the [Guardian](#). The report, while purportedly studying 'risk', is really asking 'How do we sell war to the public'? It starts with the statement that there is a "common accusation that the MoD and the Armed Forces are becoming increasingly risk averse". This aversion is apparently seen as a weakness in Government policy and a limitation on military thinking.*

This is news to me. I haven't heard anyone voicing this opinion either on the street, in government or in the more right-wing media, the latter seeming as gung-ho as ever with its clarion calls to take military action over or in Syria. In fact, reading the rest of this report, it seems to me to be just a convenient lead-in, encouraging its military readers to blame it all on the weak-kneed public. Because they genuinely have a problem - the public is, at last, beginning to change its mind about war.

The report sets out to define 'risk' and starts by quoting (who else?) one of our fabled adversaries, the Desert Fox, Field Marshall Rommel. Rommel said, "A risk is a chance you take. If it fails you can recover. A gamble is also a chance you take but if it fails recovery is impossible." It describes this statement as "somewhat trite" and follows this with its own equally trite comparison between risk and gamble.

Repeating what it calls the 'canard' (a false report or hoax, no less) of the MoD becoming more risk averse in recent years, it then admits there is little if any historical evidence of this. But perhaps the military has come to believe that "due to recent campaigns the public, and through their influence, the political leadership, have become averse to risk". Influence? Ha! The first time the public has ever stopped this country from taking military action was when, having been blitzed by letter, phone and email, Parliament voted by a narrow margin to refrain from military action over Syria. (There was one other occasion, in 1782, when Parliament withheld permission for action, but the public didn't have phones or emails then so weren't involved.)

However, the report says that 'we' (presumably the Armed Forces) are in danger of learning 'false lessons' because of recent history, because in the past the public has always, when it has become convinced of the rightness of the cause, been fully supportive of the military. Might I suggest that is because the public didn't ever find out until too late how shaky the reasons for going to war were? If there is one thing the public has learnt over the last few

years it is that the rush to war is always based on lies, propaganda and fabricated evidence, and our reactions to the West's eagerness to bomb Syria were based on that. We have good memories, even if the politicians, trotting out the same old justifications, think we have forgotten.

The report also believes that what has made us unwilling to support military action is *our* casualty rate, our risk. But it then cites the Iraq invasion being unpopular because the public, rather than worrying about the risk, could not see that it was 'in our interest'. No. What we saw, all too clearly, was how illegal it would be to invade, how determined Bush and Blair were to invade regardless of public opinion, and how Iraq was going to suffer, when it had already suffered more than enough from our previous actions.

The true blindness of those who wrote this report is horribly apparent in its 'Information Policy', and here I must quote in full:

... the Armed Forces should have a clear and constant information campaign in order to influence the major areas of press and public opinion.

The MoD should take steps to:

1. Ensure the campaign narrative is explained to the public as early and as often as is possible
2. Reduce the profile of the repatriation ceremonies
3. Discredit the concept that serving in the Forces is just another job
4. Reduce public sensitivity to the penalties inherent in military operations
5. Inculcate an attitude that Service may involve sacrifice and that such risks are knowingly and willingly undertaken as a matter of professional judgment

The suggestion that the repatriation of the bodies of those killed in combat should be out of the public eye, rather than via the very public [procession](#) of hearses going through Wootton Bassett, has infuriated and upset military families, and rightly so. Just as I am rightly bloody furious at the suggestion that my sensitivity to the 'inherent penalties' of war should be reduced. No way am I going to stop shouting about the people we kill and disable, the countries we trash and the environments we damage and destroy, just because some people like to fight wars. And considering that many of the young frontline soldiers are recruited with the reading age of a 7-11 year-old, I really don't think their 'sacrifice' is a matter of their professional judgment.

Which leads me back to the thing this report is part of: the Joint Operational Concept, the plans for how all branches of the Armed Forces will act (or react) in the years to come. The MoD's [Land Operating Concept](#) (the Army part of the enterprise) says that the concept is founded on the *uncompromising requirement* (my emphasis) to excel at war fighting. On the other hand, they insist that deterring conflict will remain a central pillar of UK policy and a crucial role for the Army. A bit schizophrenic, that. Surely fighting a war most excellently is engaging in conflict, not deterring it?

I ended up not knowing whether to be disheartened at the lack of real intelligence present in the compilers of this report or terminally angry at the implied callousness of it.

Because, on the same day that the Guardian made this public, there was also news that the MoD is happy to risk military personnel in another way. They are still giving the troops an

anti-malaria [medication](#) (mefloquine) that most doctors will not prescribe, that the US military has banned the use of and that causes psychotic, homicidal and suicidal behaviour. One of those 'inherent penalties' that is a matter of 'professional judgment', perhaps?

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