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Designing the 21st Century Wartime State

Challenges for the UK's new War Book and Defence Readiness Bill

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"One theory which had governed the War Book from its beginnings, namely that if the necessity arose it could be operated by people who had no previous dealings with it, proved to be fallacious."

Ronald Wells, Home Office civil servant in 1939

Introduction

On 24 August 1939, Parliament passed the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, giving the state broad powers to conduct the coming war, including the issue of Defence Regulations by Order in Council. By the end of the war 377 such Regulations had been created, covering everything from the price of bacon in Northern Ireland to invoking the death penalty for looting.

Simultaneously the structure of government changed. On 3 September 1939 Chamberlain formed a seven-man War Cabinet operating out of the Cabinet War Rooms and subsuming the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID). The Shadow Ministry of Economic Warfare was stood up as a fully-fledged ministry, together with ministries of Information, Home Security, National Service and Food.[1]

The transition to war was guided by a "War Book": every government department had detailed contingency manuals for what to do, including checklists, staffing rosters and step-by-step instructions for e.g. evacuation, rationing.[2]

In short, Britain entered the Second World War with a pre-designed machinery of government, a detailed transition plan, pre-existing emergency powers and emergency legislation designed to be reversible and kept under legislative check.

Today there are no shadow ministries and no War Book: the practice of maintaining one was abandoned in 2004.[3] The emergency powers enacted in that year – contained in Part II of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 – are widely regarded as inadequate in case of war with a peer adversary (see below).[4] The CCA was not used during the Covid emergency, for reasons that remain disputed in Whitehall's folk-memory.

In 2025 Strategic Defence Review (SDR 2025) called for a Defence Readiness Bill (DRB), to include "powers in reserve" to assure the continuity of public services, the safety of critical

[1] Nechama Janet Cohen Cox, The Ministry of Economic Warfare and Britain's Conduct of Economic Warfare, 1939-1945, King's College London, 2001

[2] https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11529146

[3] https://news.sky.com/story/uk-has-no-defence-plan-despite-threat-from-putins-russia-13493493

[4] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9350367/

national infrastructure, and to mobilise industry for defence purposes. But the scope of the Bill is unclear; it will not be introduced until 2027 and could then take years to be enacted.[5]

On 2 February 2026, minister of state Luke Pollard told Parliament:

> "We are looking across Government at how we can bolster readiness measures—not just legislative ones, but policy changes, removing stupid rules and spending more. We are looking to implement the Defence Readiness Bill later in this Parliament".[6]

On 10 April 2026 Sir Richard Knighton, Chief of the Defence Staff, confirmed the government is writing a new War Book "in a modern context, with modern society and modern infrastructure.[7]

That work, as in the Cold War, would necessarily take place at Secret classification or above. However, the principles to be followed in the design both of wartime emergency legislation and any national defence plan are a legitimate – indeed vital – subject for public debate and need to come out into the open.

The size and complexity of the modern state, and the attenuated memory of operating under emergency powers, make it obligatory for the public to understand in advance what the transition to peer-vs-peer armed conflict might demand of them. Indeed, the modus operandi of the enemy – to engage in hybrid and cognitive warfare in advance of kinetic – means we may never enjoy a "last days of peace" phase such as those activating the 1939 War Book did.

If, as Jenkin *et al* argue, "war necessitates a new kind of politics and new forms of governance", then the evolution of these new forms must begin with a cross-party political debate about the legal basis for emergency powers.[8]

Here, however, we meet a dilemma the British state has not encountered since the Edwardian era. The 1939 War Book would have been impossible to design or execute without existing emergency powers and a continuous corpus of War Books going back to 1911.

The memoirs of civil servant Ronald Wells, who sat on the War Book Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) from 1935, reveal that, despite long preparation, the assumption that the Book could simply be "activated" by public servants who had not seen it were

[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-strategic-defence-review-2025-making-britain-safer-secure-at-home-strong-abroad/the-strategic-defence-review-2025-making-britain-safer-secure-at-home-strong-abroad
[6] https://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2026-02-02b.23.4
[7] https://news.sky.com/story/uk-preparing-new-plan-to-ready-nation-for-war-13530181
[8] https://www.civitas.org.uk/content/files/Civitas-Warfighting-Readiness.pdf

proven wrong. So was the assumption that ministers could manage the execution of the measures it contained without deep knowledge of their interdependencies.[9]

By abolishing the War Book in 2004, the government created an unenviable challenge for its successors: you cannot write a new War Book without also preparing new emergency powers and designing new wartime institutions; but that process is constrained by legislative norms and information rights that did not exist, either in 1911 or 1939.

The generation that went to war in 1939 possessed living memories of the use of the Defence of the Realm Act during the Great War and appreciated the scope of the Emergency Powers Act 1920, which had been invoked repeatedly in the inter-war period, mainly against strikes.

We, by contrast, have only the CCA 2004 – whose Part II powers have never been invoked. This, claims Clive Walker, is not only due to the draconian nature of the powers themselves: faced with crisis, 21st century politicians have been averse to admitting that it might be beyond their control, and reluctant to submit the Executive to the Act's accountability mechanisms, which require Parliamentary renewal every seven days, and allow judicial review of any regulations made.[10]

As a result, there is a vacuum of public assumptions about what the state might do if the UK found itself on the brink of kinetic war.

Today, the legal framework for wartime governance would be conditioned by international commitments and constitutional rights that did not exist in the Second World War, the Cold War or even during the Northern Ireland conflict. UK citizens enjoy rights embodied in the Human Rights Act 1998, the three devolution Acts (1998, and 2006) plus Convention rights under the ECHR, justiciable in the UK Supreme Court and the ECtHR.

In addition, there is case law diminishing the power of the state during emergencies.[11]

In short, the UK is a much deeper and more complex democracy than in the 1930s: not just because of expanded legal and constitutional rights, but generations of custom and practice.

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[9] Memoirs of the Preparation of the Home Office War Book by Ronald Wells, GBR/0014/WELL. Churchill Archives Centre. Undated.

[10] Clive Walker. (2014). *The governance of emergency arrangements*, The International Journal of Human Rights, 18(2), 211–227.

[11] https://www.casemine.com/judgement/uk/5a8ff8db60d03e7f57ece8a1

For this reason, the scope of the proposed Defence Readiness Bill will be critical. It is the government's single chance in this parliament to adapt emergency legislation to the global threat picture. The less it delivers in that regard, the more the state risks "flying blind" in any situation where peer-vs-peer war becomes likely.

All these factors make the design of a new War Book, the DRB and machinery of government contingency plans both urgent and challenging.

In a study of 115 conflicts over the past 75 years, Efraim Benmelech, and Joao Monteiro find that wars typically degrade the quality of democracy by 13% on the V-Dem Democracy Index, with the decline continuing for up to a decade. They conclude:

> "The lesson is not that war inevitably destroys democracy. Rather, democratic resilience depends on political constraints, not on the absence of conflict itself. First wars, internal wars, and victories are precisely the moments when those constraints are most vulnerable".[12]

Acting now, to ensure the advance democratic design of wartime emergency powers, is the best way to ensure those powers are just, effective and reversible.

In her landmark study, Nomi Claire Lazar argues that liberal democracies must reject the norm/exception dichotomy when enacting emergency powers. They must establish continuity between the principles that govern the normal functioning of democracy and the measures taken during emergencies, to ensure both legitimacy and accountability.[13]

In 1939 Britain was a national economy, with capital controls, an ethnic monoculture, and a centralised state. Today it is enmeshed in global economic dependencies. It is a global financial centre, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, with powers devolved to three national parliaments, and an economy structured around private financial and commercial relationships which, in the public mind, are assumed sacrosanct. No matter how strongly we wish to learn from the experience of the 1930s, many of the challenges we face today are unique.

This paper explores ten "problem sets" that those designing UK defence readiness should address. It is compiled from open sources only.

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[12] Efraim Benmelech, and Joao Monteiro, *War and Democratic Backsliding* (January 2026). NBER Working Paper No. w34734

[13] Nomi Claire Lazar, States of Emergency in Liberal Democracies, Cambridge, 2009, p3

Ten Problem Sets for UK Government in Wartime

1. Cognitive Warfare

All 21st century conflicts are cognitive. NATO defines cognitive warfare as:

> "Activities conducted in synchronisation with other instruments of power, to affect attitudes and behaviour by influencing, protecting, or disrupting individual and group cognition to gain advantage over an adversary".[14]

Following the 2025 *Chief Scientist's Report*, NATO doctrine has recognised that adversaries are targeting the democratic resilience and the effectiveness of the state; seeking to create polarisation among individual groups and psychological uncertainty for individuals. The brain, says NATO doctrine, is both the target and the weapon.

The UK's adversaries practise hybrid warfare both in the shaping and kinetic phases. As Ofer Fridman argues, the Russian way of hybrid warfare aims:

> "…to avoid the traditional battlefield with the aim of destroying the adversary via a mixture of ideological, informational, financial, political and economic methods, ultimately leading to socio-cultural disintegration and, eventually, social collapse".[15]

These methods include disinformation, cyber-attacks, organised crime, deniable sabotage, political interference, fake and manipulated protest groups and espionage, each aiming to subject the victimised state to "reflexive control", forcing us to think and act in ways that favour the attacker.

Natalya Bugayova and Kateryna Stepanenko show that, for Russia, cognitive warfare is a cross-theatre and multigenerational activity, with narrative creation spanning decades (for example the allegation that the USA builds "biological weapon labs" in its allied states).[16] However, its longevity is also a vulnerability: Russian cognitive warfare is predictable, reliant on predetermined messages and techniques, all of which can be countered and disrupted.

Few democracies practise cognitive warfare strategies in the opposite direction, even defensively, because they are constrained by democratic rights for their citizens, and wish to

[14] https://www.sto.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/chief-scientist-report-cognitive-warfare-4.pdf
[15] Ofer Fridman, *Russian Hybrid Warfare: Resurgence and Politicisation* (London, UK: Hurst, 2018), p. 7.
[16] Natalia Bugayova and Kateryna Stepanenko, *A Primer on Russian Cognitive Warfare*, Institute for the Study of War, June 2025

abide by international law.

But for the UK in wartime, the cognitive dimension is our likely centre of gravity. We are a multinational, multi-ethnic state, already riven by significant political divisions and economic inequality. If the population does not support the state in wartime, and conform to the behaviours required, the war could be lost strategically even if it could be won operationally.

Likewise, our ability to project power in the cognitive domain would rely on agencies that today only exist in embryo, or operate in secret, and whose expansion our peacetime political culture might regard as illegitimate. The British Army's 77th Brigade Information Operations, for example, sits necessarily within the military command structure.[17] There does not appear to be a civilian institution that could co-ordinate full-spectrum cognitive operations, and creating one with democratic legitimacy will be an unprecedented challenge.

Meanwhile technological change demands that wartime information and communication powers must begin from an entirely different premise than the censorship rules imposed during the Second World War and Cold War. Before the era of networked communications, government could simply take control of the "means of production and distribution" of information and determine their content. Today that would be impossible without paralysing the digital economy itself.

However, one simply has to imagine how the Dunkirk crisis might have played out if social media had existed, with enemy disinformation and AI-generated content overwhelming the public's consciousness, to dramatise the problem.

To protect the population from systematic disinformation it would be legitimate for the state to build information firewalls; impose both voluntary and compulsory media codes of conduct; and create a central public information apparatus that could survive the degradation of the internet and the mobile phone network.

Since this would involve temporary limits on freedom of information and speech, and reduced data protection rights, it should only be done through primary legislation. In addition, national and local governments would need authorisation, tools, doctrine and training to conduct cognitive warfare operations, beyond the highly specialised and classified work of military and intelligence professionals.

[17] https://www.army.mod.uk/learn-and-explore/about-the-army/formations-divisions-and-brigades/field-army-troops/77th-brigade-information-operations/

The UK already has powers to enforce bulk data collection and retention (Investigatory Powers Act 2016); compulsory content removal and platform blocking (Online Safety Act 2023); and compulsory ID verification for e.g., anti-money laundering and company registration.

However, to keep anything resembling a public internet functioning in wartime would require a benign and reversible form of the powers used by the Chinese state – these include bans on VPNS and end-to-end encryption, IP address blocking, deep packet inspection and keyword filtering. The alternative, for a democracy that is not prepared to enact such powers and techniques, is to switch off the digital domain completely at H-Hour, as Iran did on 28 February 2026.[18]

How to retain a digital public space, while countering the hybrid and cognitive warfare efforts of the adversary, is probably the biggest political and philosophical challenge for this project and would benefit from an early public discussion of the constitutional framework in which emergency powers would be designed (see Point 7 below). For example, though polling exists on attitudes to war, none exists in the public domain on attitudes to potential information controls in wartime.

For now, there are some obvious actions:

- UK readiness and resilience efforts should be shaped around the NATO definition of cognitive warfare.[19]
- The DRB should include an HMG definition of cognitive warfare and point to the creation of a cross-government executive function for cognitive defence and security.
- As part of the "Whole of Society Conversation" on Defence, HMG should issue every household with a leaflet about what to do in a major crisis, modelled on the Swedish publication *In Case of Crisis or War.*[20]
- All Local Resilience Forums (LRFs), devolved governments and Strategic Authorities should be put through a cognitive warfare exercise in the next 24 months (see, for example, the CPUDS paper *Making Sense of Home Defence*).[21]
- HMG should commission regular polling and modelling of what the British public expects to happen to the information sphere in wartime, measuring these expectations against existing attitudes to freedom of speech and freedom from threat/intimidation.
- The BBC Charter, which is up for renewal, should reintroduce a modernised wartime public information duty, which would allow HMG to take control of public terrestrial broadcasting infrastructure, and give the BBC transparent public information duties.

[18] https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2026/apr/06/iran-internet-blackout-is-longest-national-shutdown-since-arab-spring
[19] https://www.act.nato.int/activities/cognitive-warfare/
[20] https://rib.msb.se/filer/pdf/30874.pdf
[21] https://www.exeter.ac.uk/v8media/research/centres/CPUDS_Making_Sense_of_Home_Defence.pdf

2. The Machinery of Government

A welter of recent research describes flaws in the UK's peacetime machinery of government. There is no process for national strategy formation.[22] A weak Cabinet Office - whose most senior minister lacks executive power - acts as the filter for ever-increasing demands on public services, but fails to set and maintain an overall strategy, and "the resulting vacuum is filled by the powerful Treasury".[23]

The Treasury has the power not only to micromanage departmental spending, but to block or slow policy initiatives, constraining broader strategic thinking.[24] On top of the official machinery there exists a miasma of regulation and regulatory bodies, obeying both UK, European Convention and international laws (see below).

The new Cabinet Secretary, Antonia Romeo, has called for the Cabinet Office to be "a leaner and more agile strategic centre".[25] If the outcome of her review is a 'dual use institution", resolving the problems of drift and formlessness in peacetime, but capable of leading the transition to a new machinery of government in war, that would be optimal.

In the meantime, on 14 April 2026 Keir Starmer set up the Middle East Response Committee – a small team of ministers meeting separately from both the Cabinet and COBR – to co-ordinate the UK's medium-term response to the US-Iran conflict. This foreshadows the more radical restructure that would be needed in case of all-out war.

In wartime, government must be reshaped around the overriding aim: to win by maintaining the will and the means to fight for longer than the adversary.

As Jenkin *et al* argue, the job of the Treasury becomes to pay for the war, while maintaining fiscal and monetary stability and economic freedom of action. The job of MOD is to fight the war. The job of the Centre is to mobilise all human, economic and technological forces available, and to lead the cognitive battle across multiple dimensions, while keeping public services and critical national infrastructure functioning.

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[22] Lucy Smith, *Long-term, National Strategy: Designing a Contemporary Practice of National Strategy*, Oxford Blavatnik School, June 2025
[23] Jordan Urban, Alex Thomas, Rhys Clyne, *Power with Purpose: Final report of the Commission on the Centre of Government*, Institute for Government, 2024
[24] Craig Berry, Andrew Gamble, Colin Hay, Tom Hunt and Tony Payne, *Reforming the Treasury, reorienting British capitalism*, SPERI British Political Economy Brief No. 21 (March 2016)
[25] https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/antonia-romeo-performance-objectives

As it drafts the Defence Readiness Bill and the War Book/National Defence Plan, the government therefore faces three challenges: the optimal redesign of the Machinery of Government for wartime; the transition to it; and maintaining its legitimacy and reversibility.

Since 2010 the UK has used the National Security Council, and the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office, to co-ordinate during moments of crisis, with the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR) and the Joint Intelligence Organisation (JIO) as important supporting institutions. Though the NSC was an advance on the old, informal arrangements, in a prolonged conflict with a peer adversary it is unlikely that it would be effective.

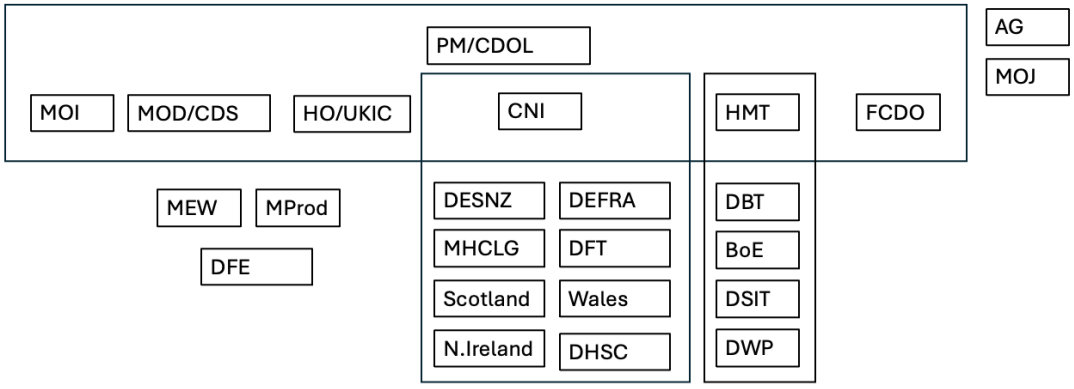
- In a war against a peer adversary, HMG should set up a War Cabinet of no more than 7 ministers. It should not replace the wider Cabinet, or junior ministerial teams, but should become the primary decision centre, including the CDS and at least one intelligence chiefs, plus key ministers, making all strategic decisions about the war across the kinetic, economic and cognitive domains.
- There should be a CNI super-ministry, with a cluster of CNI-focused departments and the devolved administrations sitting beneath it.
- Given the importance both of cognitive and cyber warfare, the UK Intelligence Community (UKIC) should have ministerial representation. Since the agencies are currently represented separately, by the Home Office and FCDO, this might demand a more centralised intelligence structure, of the kind Japan has recently adopted.[26]
- The National Armaments Directorate, formed within the MOD in 2025, should separate into a Ministry of War Production, with powers to command and control the private sector, and its own minister, centralising the work of DBT and DSIT.
- The economic security units scattered around Whitehall (Investment Security Unit, National Economic Crime Centre, Export Control Unit etc) should merge to become a Ministry of Economic Warfare.[27]
- DCMS should become the Ministry of Information, with primary responsibility for fighting the cognitive battle, while Ofcom becomes both a censorship and licensing body, and keeps the information infrastructure running. The powers of the Information Commissioner's Office would be, in effect, rebalanced towards limited protections for the individual and authorised rights for the state.
- The devolved governments of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales should retain their powers to protect CNI, and run health, education and the emergency services, but cede

[26] https://www.japantimes.co.jp/commentary/2026/04/08/japan/japans-intelligence-overhaul-overdue/
[27] https://www.britainsworld.org.uk/p/the-memorandum-16-2025

- national co-ordinating responsibility to a UK-wide CNI ministerial cluster, covering food, water, transport, energy, emergency healthcare and communications.
- Mayoral and Strategic Authorities should become the primary tier of local government, with the power to direct all institutional tiers below them, and to conduct a "mosaic" defence should the central government fail.
- The Local Resilience Forums (LRFs, RRFs in Scotland) should gain enhanced wartime powers and duties, becoming the operational command structures for emergency services and disaster relief.
- In whatever system is set up, there must be clear a statement of where mandatory authority / authorities lie.

A notional organogram of Wartime HMG shows how radically these proposals would change the machinery of government:

Notional UK Government restructured around a 7-person War Cabinet



Key: PM: Prime Minister; CDOL: Chancellor of the Dutchy of Lancaster elevated to Cabinet Office Secretary of State; MOI: Minister of Information; MOD/CDS: Minister of Defence/ Chief of Defence Staff; HO/UKIC: Minister for Home Defence; CNI: Minister for CNI; HMT: Chancellor of the Excequer; FCDO: Foreign Secretary. MEW: Minister of Economic Warfare; MProd: Minister for Production.

Obviously, alternative designs should be modelled and tested, but whatever plan is adopted senior civil and public servants are trained and prepared for the transition to it.

Equally important is the culture shift required across the entire public sector, and the civil service in particular. Crises can be managed; wars have to be won – and the job of senior decision makers in wartime is not simply to manage the impacts on UK society and industry defensively, but actively to find ways of taking the fight to the adversary.

3. A Bonfire of Regulations and Institutions

The UK statute book currently holds more than 10,000 unrepealed Acts of Parliament, plus an estimated 80,000 pieces of secondary legislation. As recent debates on smart regulation show, the primary effect of this framework is to impede effective government.[28]

In wartime this would present an urgent and perilous problem, because one of the underlying assumptions of UK regulatory culture is that the state cannot direct the private sector, but rather incentivise its behaviours through regulation.

This is particularly problematic for Critical National Infrastructure (CNI), most of which has been privatised, and where government currently practices arms-length incentivisation through regulators like Ofwat, Ofgem, Ofcom, or through public corporations such as the National Energy System Operator (NESO).[29]

There are dozens of such UK regulatory bodies, each "sponsored" by a Whitehall department, together with around 25 "statutory consultees" with the power to block or delay government actions: they include Natural England, the Environment Agency, Historic England, the Health and Safety Executive, the Fire and Rescue Authority, and Sport England.

These bodies constitute an *ecosystem*, not a command structure, and if allowed to function under "business as usual" would be an existential obstacle to action. If HMG adopted the wartime practice of issuing Defence Regulations/Orders in Council, they would quickly render this thicket of regulations and regulators defunct.

Though there is no authoritative register of workforce numbers in these bodies, the combined staff of these regulators and statutory consultees may amount to tens of thousands, and even more once we consider the civil servants and local government officials whose job it is to ensure compliance. The release of that workforce for war-related tasks would seem like an early win during an emergency. However, as is the case in other countries, there is an immediate requirement for a list of key workers and some form of training to take place in the short/medium term.

- As it designs the Defence Readiness Bill, the government should map the relationships between ministries, regulators and statutory consultees in all war-related sectors (e.g., health, transport, energy) and prepare a list of powers to be suspended and

[28] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/664c8e09b7249a4c6e9d38a3/smarter-regulation-delivering-a-regulatory-environment-for-innovation-investment-and-growth.pdf
[29] https://www.neso.energy/what-we-do

organisations to be slimmed down/dissolved during wartime. Though some of this would necessarily remain at Secret or above, much of what would disappear is obvious, and it would be better to make this clear in principle.

4. Secure Government Communications

In wartime, the ability of the Government to communicate securely is the baseline for all other forms of resilience. The public digital infrastructure, across which much of government is normally conducted – commercial datacentres, cellular networks, commercial satellite comms – will be high on the adversary's target list.

The UK's Public Services Network provides a digital UK government communications system to more than 100,000 sites, including information at both Official and Secret classifications, via a "network of networks". But there is no physically hardened and *separate* system such as exists in Lithuania.[30]

Lithuania's system, the Secure State Data Transmission Network (SSDCN), is an independent, encrypted network for ~500 core state institutions, designed to operate separately from public telecommunications networks and to support crisis and mobilisation functions.

Building such a physically separate and hardened system for a country the size of the UK, with many more potential users, would be a challenge. But it would be a wise investment:

- The Government should consider building a Lithuanian-style hardened secure state communications system for use in wartime, which uses redundancy to overcome single points of failure across space, fibre and the electro-magnetic spectrum.

5. Critical National Infrastructure Powers

During the Second World War, the *Luftwaffe* focused primarily on bombing war production sites and ports, and terrorising the population, while the *Kriegsmarine* tried to blockade the UK in the Atlantic. Beyond hitting the ports, Germany staged little in the way of attacks on domestic CNI.

By contrast Russia's pattern of strikes against Ukraine suggest that, in a conventional war, it might concentrate on crippling the UK;s food, water, energy, communications and transport networks – both on land and, with the network of data cables, gas and electricity pipelines, beneath the sea (the whole of UK CNI is helpfully mapped in granular detail on an open source website, run by a private individual).[31]

[30] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371703617_Cyber_Lessons_that_the_World_Can_Learn_from_Lithuania
[31] https://openinframap.org/#4.37/54.1/-2.76

Each of these networks has both a physical and a digital vulnerability: it can be rendered inoperative through destruction or through cyber-attack. The Alan Turing Institute is working on engineering and cybersecurity protections for UK CNI,[32] while NISMOD, produced by the academic alliance ITRC, is "the world's first national infrastructure system-of-systems modelling platform".[33] Though focused on disaster planning, NISMOD would have obvious uses in the CNI battle during wartime, where the state will struggle both for control and sightlines into what is working, what the critical dependencies are, and how to overcome them.

However, the UK does not currently possess legal powers to control and prioritise CNI.

- The Defence Readiness Bill should signal the intention to take powers to centrally manage all CNI during wartime, and create a preparatory apparatus at national, Strategic Authority, sectoral and local levels.
- Wartime powers might include energy rationing, price controls, reserved occupations for certain CNI employees, criminal offences of trespass and sabotage concerning CNI etc
- In addition, in all scenarios, the UK should model and exercise the machinery for Strategic Authorities/LRFs to take over the running of local CNI, should centralised control break down (see below).

With further development, a tool such as NISMOD might be able to give a wartime CNI Super-ministry real-time oversight of all sectors and their dependencies.

6. War Production

In British security circles the paradigm of the Short War/Long War is increasingly discussed. In this scenario, assumptions that any peer-vs-peer conflict would be short and intense have been replaced by expectations that the adversary might, in the follow-on phase, seek to degrade the UK's economy and social resilience through a mixture of kinetic and hybrid warfare lasting years, not months.

No amount of preparatory or emergency legislation can adequately prepare for this, since the dynamics of the Long War would develop spirally, as in Ukraine. But economic deterrence demands the UK begins now to build the industrial, technological, scientific, human and supply chain resilience it would need in case of the Long War.

The challenge starts at the top. UK fiscal and monetary policies are set independently, with Bank

[32] https://www.turing.ac.uk/science-innovation/defence-and-national-security/critical-national-infrastructure
[33] https://www.itrc.org.uk/index.html@p=39881.html

of England's role rooted in the wartime fiscal crisis of 1694. And the multilateral institutions of the rules-based order – IMF, BIS etc – are built on the assumption of monetary dominance.

However, neither Russia nor China operates under such constraint: fiscal dominance is built into their economic governance.

- As part of the War Book preparations, HMG should model a new institutional framework, creating an economic governance structure that can use the levers of fiscal and monetary power in concert during wartime.

Beyond finance, in December 2024 the MOD conducted a supply chain and industrial production wargame at the Defence Academy, Shrivenham, which showed that "our supply chains are largely designed for peacetime operating (with minimal resistance) not war". "The overarching request" wrote the then permanent secretary David Williams, "was for the 'big idea'."[34] It is not clear that, 18 months on, such a big idea exists.

The DRB should therefore establish in advance:

- The legal basis on which government would direct companies, universities, banks, workers and CNI providers in wartime.
- Statutory mechanisms for nationalisation and industrial planning.
- A single, resilient digital ERP/Supply Chain mapping tool for the UK defence industry and its supply chain

Beyond that, learning the lessons of Ukraine, the MOD and relevant ministries (DBT/DSIT) should prepare platforms and industrial co-ordination tools that could be activated at the approach to war.[35] In addition:

- In future civil defence exercises, and in modelling, Departments, devolved administrations and Strategic Authorities should practise the transition to this more centralised form of industrial governance, and its potential maintenance during the "Long War" scenario.

7. Updating the Civil Contingencies Act 2004

Andrew Blick argues that CCA 2004 was the culmination of almost a century of encroachment by Parliament and the courts on the Common Law-derived rights of the Crown (and thus the

[34] https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/48864/documents/256523/default/
[35] https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-ukraine-rebuilt-its-military-acquisition-system-around-commercial-technology

Executive), known as the Royal Prerogative.[36]

Though the CCA grants ministers the right, through Order in Council or diktat, to create any law, it forbids the amendment of the Human Rights Act under such powers, and of itself. Importantly, Section 23 of the CCA contains a list of limitations on such Orders that would require government to legitimise any revived War Book through separate primary legislation.

Under the CCA, for example, government cannot compel citizens to do military service; nor can it ban strikes "or other industrial action". And though the CCA allows ministers to create wartime offences of non-compliance with Regulations, these offences must be capable of being tried by jury and cannot involve imprisonment beyond three months. Nor can a minister alter criminal justice procedures using the CCA.

Though essential in peacetime, these caveats render the CCA 2004 inadequate for enacting the kind of war powers needed in a peer-vs-peer conflict, requiring government to contemplate separate emergency legislation for conscription, serious offences, internment and any restriction on industrial action. These need not be in the DRB 2027, but they must be placed on the preparedness agenda so that they can be debated democratically.

However, the CCA itself also recognises that the Prerogative continues to exist, and that in particular, extreme and urgent circumstances it might be used in its traditional form, by the executive without recourse to Parliament. That, however, has never been tested in the era of the Human Rights and Constitutional Reform Acts.

Though neither Russia nor the PRC have officially commented on CCA 2004, we can be certain that both they and their proxies will take a keen interest in how willing government is to use the DRB to strengthen UK emergency powers.

A strong DRB with cross-party backing would be an important deterrent signal to any aggressor. In turn, a weak one, harried through the Commons under pressure from anti-democratic domestic forces of the extreme left and right, would be a gift to our adversaries.

Unlike in 1939, therefore, a complex challenge lies ahead for the drafters of any revived War Book/DRB/Shadow Ministry complex. The course of action most likely to guarantee democratic legitimacy and reversibility would be to:

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[36] Andrew Blick, *'Wartime Government': The Constitutional Dimension*, The Constitution Society, 18 March 2020

1. Draft the key operational war powers and map their interdependencies at Secret classification or above
2. Certify which could be enacted under CCA 2004, and which would require primary legislation
3. Include as many as possible such powers in the DRB 2027
4. Include those which cannot be in the DRB in a draft Emergency War Powers Bill which could be subjected to scrutiny and debate as any crisis approaches.
5. Use the Royal Prerogative when all else fails.

The political gamble facing government – in an era of heightened threat, internal division and centrifugal politics - is that it fails to gain a majority for the relevant powers at in the Defence Readiness Bill, leaving more of them to be dealt with at stage 4, when – again – it might fail to secure a majority, leaving the Royal Prerogative as the backstop.

In 1939, with a massive Conservative majority, including MPs from the National Labour and National Liberal parties, parliamentary support for emergency powers was a foregone conclusion. Indeed, the Labour opposition also supported the Bill, while urging harder regulations on capital and greater tolerance for industrial action.[37]

Today, voters are much more literate on civil and human rights, and it is likely that the DRB itself will become the object of a hybrid onslaught by the UK's adversaries. Achieving maximum clarity and transparency at the design stage will be crucial for whole-of-society acceptance that such emergency provision exists, even if it is never activated.

8. People: Mobilisation, Reservation, Rights and Duties

The people problem-set in wartime is well understood from history: the same cohort of skilled and able-bodied adults is simultaneously asked to join the armed forces, switch to defence production and run the existing civilian economy. The job of legislation is to provide powers to make these trade-offs from a holistic standpoint - rather than a series of compulsions and exemptions that begin to contradict each other.

The job of the revived War Book is, in this regard, to anticipate a complex problem: how, and in what order, to reallocate human resources from the civilian private sector to the military and to war production/technological research, while maximising the benefits and minimising the costs.

[37] https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1939-08-24/debates/290c6623-5b8a-4bbd-8688-69c551d6021c/EmergencyPowers(Defence)Bill

That in turn demands quantitative and qualitative research and modelling on a scale that is not currently available.

Following its September 2024 report *Driving Growth and Widening Opportunities*, Skills England published the first quantitative assessment of skills demand across priority sectors and is developing the UK Standard Skills Classification.[38] Sited within the DWP, the body has developed Local Skills Improvement Plans framed around Strategic Authorities.

There is an obvious development pathway for Skills England, both in facilitating rearmament in peacetime and, in the event of war, to become the framework for a Ministry of Labour.

During the Second World War, workers' occupations were recorded on their identity cards, and on a national register – while skilled engineers literally carried around their qualification papers. Alongside this, the Essential Works Order (1941) allowed detailed reallocation, using compulsory registration at Employment Exchanges.[39]

To allow any kind of centralised direction and individual reservation of occupations, the data and taxonomy currently being developed within Skills England would need to be (a) UK wide and (b) linked – as in the Second World War – to personal ID.

9. Centralisation vs Mosaic Defence

The penultimate problem-set concerns the choice between centralisation and dispersal of power during a prolonged conflict. Despite devolution, the UK remains a centralised state, its energy network still shaped around a few large generation nodes, its transport routes convergent on London, its cities dependent on nationally co-ordinated food and water supplies, and the whole country served by inputs of digital, gas and electricity that are geographically concentrated.

Should an adversary succeed in isolating the periphery from the centre, the surviving devolved, regional and local governments would need powers defined in advance to ensure continuity of the state at local level, together with a regional survival plan.

This was a problem Wells encountered early on, when the government believed mass bombing would destroy Whitehall in the first days of the war, and made extensive preparations for

[38] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-england-report-driving-growth-and-widening-opportunities
[39] http://www.unionhistory.info/workerswar/browse.php?page=1&book=The+Home+Front+in+the+Factories%2C+Docks+and+Mines.

Regional Commissioners to rule, under a Ministry for Home Security bunkered outside London. For as long as they were stood up, these regional power commands got in the way of effective communication between the centre and the local operational commands.

Though the worst fears of 1939 never came to pass, today, with precision strikes on CNI becoming the *modus operandi* of states in warfare, and devastating cyber and economic effects possible alongside kinetic ones, those designing emergency measures need to model and test alternatives to centralised control in circumstances well below the threshold of a nuclear exchange.

Here the problem is compounded by the patchwork and changing nature of devolved powers. There is still no authoritative map of the Mayoral and Strategic Authorities that will emerge from UK local government reform; meanwhile the 43 Local/Regional Resilience Forums are based on police authorities that are set to change under Home Office plans for larger, regional police forces.[40]

In wartime, whatever boundaries are set by the democratic design of regional planning and policing structures, two other factors "get a vote": geography and the enemy. Any design for regional wartime resilience must take account of the geographic vulnerabilities that exist (rivers, watersheds, ports etc) and how the adversary might exploit them: red-teaming at regional and local level becomes just as relevant as the work of red teams in a classified environment.

- The Defence Readiness Bill should identify and simplify the primary resilience duties for each tier of government: national, regional and local.
- A future exercise should test the resilience of regional civilian command, control and communications structures in a scenario where unitary government and national CNI functioning comes under stress.

Conclusion

The above survey points to an over-arching challenge, or problem-set #10: ensuring democratic legitimacy but with mandatory authorities invested within a much-reduced set of decision-makers.

The CCA 2004 is inadequate as a "wrapper" for the kind of emergency powers needed in wartime. The proposed Defence Readiness Bill – even if it only deals with armed forces

[40] https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8582/CBP-8582.pdf

mobilisation, CNI directive powers, government direction of the defence industry and the Home Defence duties of devolved and Strategic Authorities – will effectively create a second tier of wartime emergency powers.

However, as the CRINK countries have adopted hybrid and cognitive warfare strategies, to pursue devastating effects through non-kinetic means, today's lawmakers are presented with a phasing problem that did not face their counterparts in 1939.

The initial design of the 1930s War Book included a Precautionary Stage and a War Stage. This was amended after the 1938 Munich crisis to include a "Threat of War" Stage. Today we face a "prolonged hybrid stage" in which the fundamental challenge is to maintain an open and vibrant democracy *without* evoking the powers needed for the state of exception.

The preference of this author is to avoid the state of exception for as long as possible, but to make it strict, and dependent on a state of armed conflict with a peer aggressor.

The public, meanwhile, remains largely oblivious – both to the scale of the changes in its rights and duties that would be enacted in wartime, and to the challenge this poses to the norms of democracy we are trying to defend. More importantly, there are considerable risks if the public does not agree to play its part.

As Lazar points out, modern authoritarians, both of the right and left, embrace the dichotomy of the normal functioning of society vs the state of exception. For authoritarians, the norms apply until war or crisis breaks out and then, simply, they don't.[41]

In 1939 this was not a major problem. Though the Communist Party of Great Britain protested the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, at the point of its enactment, it supported the war, and its single MP did not speak against it. Only four left wing Labour MPs voted against as a point of pacifist principle.

Today, with stronger pacifist and anti-NATO voices in Parliament, and an anti-democratic and illiberal ethos resonant within UK civil society, the political centre needs to design wartime emergency powers to be resistant to the logic of authoritarianism.

Opening the debate now, through pre-legislative scrutiny of the DRB, and by creating an expert community of interest around the National Defence Plan, is the best way to ensure that such powers – both *de jure* and *de facto* – remain reversible and derived from the will of the people.

[41] Nomi Claire Lazar, States of Emergency in Liberal Democracies, Cambridge, 2009, p136

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