

THE BRITISH ARMY - MANPOWER AND SOCIETY INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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Hew Strachan is Professor of Modern History and Director of the Scottish Centre for War Studies at the University of Glasgow. In *The British Army – Manpower and Society into the Twenty-First Century* he has drawn together a collection of authors, many of whom have an intimate and practical knowledge of the British Army, to examine one central theme: namely how different should, and can, the modern British Army be from the society it serves. At first glance it might appear that this topic has little to offer for those with an interest in air forces; however, on closer reading the book identifies many issues that apply to the UK armed forces as a whole rather than just the British Army.

Broken down into 3 sections – The Historical Context, the Army and Modern Society and Social Change and Fighting Effectiveness – the book is built upon individual chapters that stand alone as papers in their own right. Consequently it is easy to dip into areas of specific interest, with the added benefit that the chapters are also sensibly titled so that the subject matter discussed within is easily recognisable.

Part 1, The Historical Context, as its name implies, is a review of the British Army and its interaction with society over the last century and

although interesting in historical terms there is little here for the student of air power. Part 2 however examines the current relationship between the Army and society from a sociological aspect and there is much here that is relevant to the Royal Air Force. The nature of modern society and attitudes towards women, homosexuals and racial minorities are all covered in detail and are recommended reading for anyone with an interest in the sociology of the armed forces. However, it should be noted that throughout the book references to the question of whether homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the Army appear dated in light of recent events.

Perhaps of greatest interest to the air minded reader is Part 3 that looks at social change and fighting effectiveness. It examines doctrine, the moral component, the human dimension and fighting spirit. All of these have their direct parallel in the conduct of air operations and it is an interesting and thought provoking exercise to compare and contrast how these issues relate to the Royal Air Force. There is perhaps a gap in the market for a similar publication written from an RAF perspective.

Overall this book is of value for those interested in the wider issues concerning the armed forces and society and, although it is totally focused on the British Army, many of the issues discussed are relevant to the other services. Additionally, as the UK armed forces progress down the route of ‘jointery’ it is also commended to those who work alongside the British Army as it gives a useful insight into what really makes it tick.

**Wing Commander David Caddick
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