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Change in the importance of ethnicity and religiosity in the British Armed Forces from the perspective of the military chaplaincy

Abstract

Like the armed forces of every country, the British Army is undergoing constant structural change and is doing so to respond to the latest challenges of its time. As part of this process, a clear trend in the personnel composition is becoming apparent, playing a catalyst for change. My working hypothesis is that ethnic and religious change should be the primary focus, precisely because these two factors, and changes in the proportion of these factors, are currently seen as having the most significant impact on military chaplaincy. Furthermore, by looking at these transformations, the growing number of theoretical challenges to the organisation of chaplaincy and the increasing number of practical obstacles to chaplains themselves can be best understood. I will use qualitative method to prove my hypothesis, utilising statistical data and personal narratives. Methods and rules to address the problems that arise without any criteria are not currently in place in the British Army, as it seems that at the moment, even amid change, only flexible responses to these challenges can be given, as the situation demands. I will focus on these at the end of the thesis alongside forecasting the upcoming resolutions.

Keywords: Royal Army, diversity, mission, chaplaincy, Afghanistan

1. Introduction

Diversity. Perhaps the most important word that comes up at the moment is about army personnel. The organising principles that affect and shape contemporary British society have begun to have the same effect on the composition of military personnel. Gender, age, ethnicity and religion fundamentally influence the change of balance.

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The trends that emerge clearly from examining the following statistics show where the composition of the military is heading. The longer-term role may be necessary for the researcher, as the existing changes will continue to challenge the military. While it is not the purpose of this paper to examine all possible aspects and outcomes, we cannot ignore the idea of how the components not discussed here may further influence the changes in the composition of the British Army and thus its deployability, interoperability and combat readiness.

2. Statistical background and illustration of diversity and ethnicity

To better understand, it looks necessary to examine the relevant sources and data. When defining the army's ethnicity, several factors are taken into account, first and foremost, that its personnel are drawn from the UK² and, in increasing numbers, from Commonwealth countries.³ In the official surveys, some 99.2% of the armed forces declared their ethnicity, in a proportion similar to that of religious affiliation.⁴ How do the figures look broken down? Non-British nationals make up 45.5% of non-white (English, Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish) personnel within the force, with personnel from white family backgrounds accounting for 55% of the current non-British personnel. The Gurkhas feature prominently in officially released ministry statistics and figures, with Nepal's elite force numbering 9.5% of the Army as of end-2019.⁵ Along with other trends, although the overall numbers of British forces, including ground forces, have been steadily declining, the number of Gurkhas, including other ethnic (BAME) personnel, has increased by almost 18% in the three years since October 2016.⁶ It is essential to point out here that these "discriminatory" labels and statistics come from the British Government itself so that policymakers can see clearly the extent of inequality in the country's ethnic composition and its representation in the military. In line with the sociological trends in the civil sector, politicians set a mandatory 10% minority quota by 2020. Statistics over the last decade or so clearly show that, despite some setbacks, the proportion of people from BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) backgrounds is increasing, and by September 2019, it looks set to approach the 10% target.⁷

² Soldiers representing the former Hong Kong and British Overseas Territories are counted as British citizens.

³ The Ministry of Defence has maximised the number of non-UK staff recruited in 2018 to 1,350 people per year. They mostly come from members of the Commonwealth of Nations, including Fiji, Ghana, South Africa, Jamaica, Australia. This rule does not apply to applicants from the Republic of Ireland or the Brigade of Gurkhas. (Ministry of Defence: *Armed Forces to Step Up Commonwealth Recruitment*. 05 November 2018.)

⁴ Ministry of Defence: *UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics*. 01 October 2019a.

⁵ Ministry of Defence: *UK Armed Forces Quarterly Service Personnel Statistics*. 1 October 2019b.

⁶ The personnel of the Gurkha Brigade stands in numbers as follows: 2,800 people in October 2016, 3,380 people as of 1 October 2019.

⁷ An exciting contributing factor seems to be the Brexit referendum held in June 2016 in the UK. Official charts show a sharp rise in the proportion of the Army's non-British nationals following the referendum.

3. Overview of religious and denominational affiliations

In the latest official statement, published by the British Ministry of Defence,⁸ 66.3% of the British Armed Forces (UK Regular Forces, which includes the Army, the Royal Navy and the RAF) declared itself Christian (without naming any denomination).⁹ The exact figure for professional reserves (Future Reserves 2020) was 71.7% on 1 October 2019, when the statistics were published.

In any case, it is essential to consider the fact that a substantial proportion of the armed forces have made a public decision of their own free will about their religion, unlike, for example, their sexuality, which is declared by just over a fifth of the personnel. Almost all of the active personnel, 99.9% of soldiers, declared their religious affiliation voluntarily, while the ratio of reservists reached 98.4% in the same matter. In return, the overall calculation resulted in a proportion of about 30.5% of the persons who did not consider themselves to be believers, and only 3.3% of the personnel declared themselves to belong to other religions, faiths, or anyone not affiliated with a church or faith.¹⁰ The number of active personnel professed to be Christian is higher than in the reserves, at 71.7%, which implies a lower proportion of non-religious and other religions, thus:

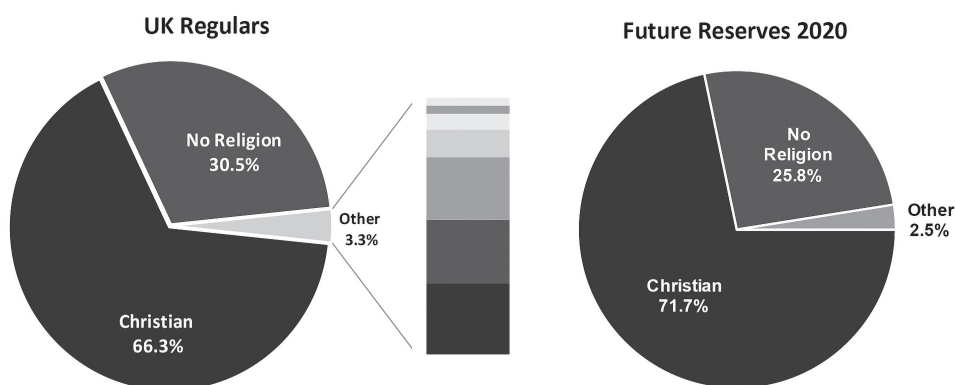


Figure 1: Religious share of UK Regulars and Reserves in 2019
Source: Ministry of Defence 2019a

It should be pointed out that the proportion of people who consider themselves non-religious is steadily increasing in the army.¹¹ Over the last seven years, specifically from 1 October 2012 to 1 October 2019, their number almost doubled (from 15.5%

⁸ Ministry of Defence (2019a): op. cit.

⁹ Compared to 62% of the civilian staff working for the Ministry of Defence. Among them, the proportion of seculars is 32.5%, and 5.5% are not Christians.

¹⁰ According to the MoD, this term covers the following: agnostics, atheists, humanists and secularists.

¹¹ In 2011, around 25% of the population in England and Wales declared themselves non-religious, compared to 15.5% in the army.

to 30.5%).¹² By looking at the statistics, it seems quite clear that army personnel undergo similar religious changes to those experienced by the British society.

Although at first glance, a share of more than two-thirds of all religious practitioners in 2020 seems relatively high, especially in the western half of Europe, this picture is slightly more nuanced by the results of another study. According to the Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research,¹³ a prominent Great Britain-based think tank, almost exactly a quarter of the British society, 27% of the respondents to the survey to be precise, believe that religion (without naming it) does not play an essential or decisive role in their lives.

The 2016 publication confirms that the UK is one of the least religious countries globally, or otherwise one of the most secular countries on a global scale. In this respect, it seems self-evident to compare the army with society, which also plays a part in our further research objectives.¹⁴

4. Religions and denominations

The UK Ministry of Defence, in keeping with the country's social tradition, seeks to include members of all religions and denominations. The Equality Act 2010¹⁵ places a tremendous emphasis on ensuring equal treatment and freedom for all believers alongside, or more precisely with, Christian-majority military and civilian personnel, taking into account as many aspects as possible while maintaining the required operational effectiveness.¹⁶ Since the law excludes discrimination, it also emphasises ensuring that believers in traditional religions (such as Christian, Muslim, Jewish or Hindu) and nondenominational Christianity are not treated unequally (since the law is about religion and belief). Nevertheless, by extension, it includes all those who identify themselves as non-believers or non-religious.¹⁷ In any case, it seems inevitable that the religious majority shows a particular demand for getting pastoral care and the military chaplaincy can fulfil this spiritual need.

5. Royal Army Chaplains' Department – The Chaplaincy and the chaplains

There are three different chaplaincy services run within the British Armed Forces; in order of rank, those within the Royal Navy,¹⁸ the Royal Army, and finally, the Royal Air

¹² By 2018, the population of non-religious individuals had jumped to 35% in England and Wales.

¹³ See their website at <https://chacr.org.uk>

¹⁴ Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research: Religion and Violent Conflict. *Ares and Athena*, 4 (2016).

¹⁵ Government Equalities Office: *Equality Act 2010: Guidance*. 27 February 2013.

¹⁶ Operational effectiveness is the standard by which the Army will be judged, and defines it in terms of fighting power, for more information see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/492532/AGAI_067.pdf

¹⁷ Thus agnostics, atheists, freethinkers, humanists, rationalists, sceptics, secularists are included. (Ministry of Defence: *Guide on Religion and Belief in the Armed Forces*. s. a.)

¹⁸ Although the smallest force, it acts with seniority, which honour is based on King Alfred of Wessex's successful attack on the invading Danish ships in A.D. 897. (Royal Navy: *Royal Navy History*. s. a.)

Force.¹⁹ Their joint mission²⁰ and goal are to provide spiritual guidance, moral leadership and pastoral care to all those in need, regardless of their faith or religion.²¹ In all three branches, chaplains are involved in the primary and further training of personnel to transmit the values that are essential and fundamental to the service of soldiers, including: in the transmission of offering moral guidance through formal teaching, counsel and personal example; in spiritual support, both publicly and privately, at every level of the Army; providing pastoral care at home and abroad.²² The Army Chaplains' Department has a longer than 220 years history,²³ but the principles, dogmatics, call, care, compassion and prayer have not changed apart from the change of conflicts. As part of this role, the chaplains emphasise the structural importance of the organisation, thus clearly promoting a cohesive military identity based on a commitment to "traditional" values (which seem to be much stronger than in modern society), including the Christian – and more notably Anglican communion and heritage.

Chaplains are professionally Qualified Officers who have been ordained in one of the recognised Sending Churches and have been selected to hold a commission²⁴ in the Army, made the process officially done by the head of the Armed Forces herself – the Queen. This commission²⁵ is fundamentally different from that of military officers, as chaplains do not strictly become part of the chain of command²⁶ or otherwise part of the defined military structure.²⁷ The chaplains are commissioned in the Regular Army, Reservist Army, or Army Cadet Force²⁸ accordingly. A bit more in details, the Chaplains wear the uniforms of the British Army and accompany their soldiers wherever they go. Of course, it means they report to the commanding officer in which they are serving and where the unit is getting deployed. They, in this term at least, have equal rank with other officers where appropriate.²⁹ Their privileged role is demonstrated by the fact that they can be given orders from their superior body, the RACHD, and the commanding officer on secondment during the deployment or operation.³⁰ As

¹⁹ RACHD: *Royal Army Chaplains' Department*. s. a.

²⁰ See in *The Queen's Regulations for the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force*.

²¹ Andrew J. Todd: Religion, Security, Rights, the Individual and Rates of Exchange: Religion in Negotiation with British Public Policy in Prisons and the Military. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 28, no. 1 (2014). 7.

²² *Chaplain. Royal Army Chaplains Dept.* s. a.

²³ It was formed by the Royal Warrant of 23 September 1796.

²⁴ Chaplains initially receive a twelve-year commission with a minimum period of three years' return of service. With satisfactory service this can be extended in stages to age 60 (Regular and Reservist) or 65 (Army Cadet Force). (RACHD [s. a.]: op. cit.)

²⁵ If a chaplain is offered a commission, they will undertake initial training at the Armed Forces' Chaplaincy Centre. They then spend a few months at their first unit before undergoing military training on the ten-week Professionally Qualified Officers' course. (RACHD [s. a.]: op. cit.)

²⁶ The command structure is hierarchical with divisions and brigades responsible for administering groupings of smaller units. Major Units are regiment or battalion-sized with minor units being smaller, either company sized sub-units or platoons. *Command Structure*. s. a.

²⁷ In addition to Christianity, practitioners of major religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and the Sikhi) are supported by their Civilian Chaplains to the Military (CCM). The five full-time chaplains serve each faith group in the armed forces.

²⁸ Interestingly, two Rabbis serve as part-time Army Cadet Force chaplains.

²⁹ This is clearly explained in *The Armed Forces (Naval Chaplains) Regulations 2009*, where the Act says: "A naval chaplain is commissioned as such, and is not an officer."

³⁰ Assignments to units generally last between two and three years. Over time this enables chaplains to experience ministry in a wide variety of settings. (RACHD [s. a.]: op. cit.)

per the current British Army's service practice, their unique status³¹ appears clearly because they exercise leadership and management but do not command. Also, they are non-combatants and do not bear arms.³² According to the eminent researcher and expert on the subject, Reverend Andrew Todd,³³ the duality of the vocation of a military chaplain seems straightforward since it is pretty uniquely not only a religious but also a military service, with all the attendant aspects of both.³⁴ Of course, like their pastoral 'counterparts' in civilian life, the military chaplains serve as a "moral compass" for soldiers in need. Moreover, in the military sense, they have even more responsibilities. One of the most important, as already mentioned, is the guidance in the development of the military ethos required and expected by the army during training.³⁵ The other essential role of the chaplains' character rises in the conflicts area when the unit is abroad on a mission. When the British Army is actively engaged in an operational duty, the Chaplains' tasks include negotiating with religious leaders in this area, thus, acting as the liaison between the deployed units and local populations. According to Todd, this dynamic internal state creates an often, perhaps, unintended dichotomy in the military chaplains whilst practising their vocation. Unpacking this dichotomy is one of the pillars of our further research, together with an interpretation of the symbolism and symbolic capital of the chaplaincy's vocation.

6. Esteeming the role of diversity

While there is no doubt that there are undeniable advantages to the free exercise of religion within the military, there is no escaping the potential conflicts arising from particular fundamental views or dogmatics of religions. Accordingly, the Equality Act 2010 emphasises the right to embrace different sexual orientations freely and protect them against harmful discrimination that religious practitioners might make up. In other words, the free expression of sexual orientation, for instance, in some cases overrides religious interests and principles and even the exercise of religiously based opinions in this regard.³⁶ To achieve religious equality, since 2005, the British Army has offered full-time non-military, actually civilian chaplaincy service to religious minorities other than Christians, such as Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Jews. Although the UK Ministry of Defence has traditionally been the second largest public employer in the UK,³⁷ research on Equality and Diversity assessment was not high on the political agenda for a long time, until 1997 to be precise, when gap mapping became part of

³¹ Under the Geneva Convention, chaplains of other armed forces carry or may carry weapons. (Andrew J. Todd: Preventing the "Neutral" Chaplain? The Potential Impact of Anti-"Extremism" Policy on Prison Chaplaincy. *Practical Theology*, 6 [2013]. 144–158.)

³² In contrast, for example, to medical personnel who wear side weapons for self-defence.

³³ The Reverend Canon Dr Andrew Todd was the Director of the Cardiff Centre for Chaplaincy Studies, currently a Director of Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology at Ruskin University.

³⁴ Andrew J. Todd: *Writing up the Padre: The Significance of Chaplaincy Studies for the Narrativisation of Military Chaplaincy*. s. a.

³⁵ Directorate General of Doctrine and Development: *Soldiering. The Military Covenant*. Army Doctrine Publication. Volume 5. AC 71642 (2000).

³⁶ Ministry of Defence (s. a.): op. cit.

³⁷ Only the NHS employs more staff than the MoD.

the political agenda. Hussain and Ishaq confirm the same. They point out that the British Army has been receiving solid accusations of the widespread complaint about being an organisation with a sexist, racist and homophobic attitude with most white men, where personnel cannot practise E&D as there is no place for it.³⁸

In doing so, the researchers began to map critical indicators so that they could finally get a more realistic picture of previously unequally treated factors such as gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion. Gender awareness and Cross Cutting Topics (CCT) have gained rapid importance even by CIMIC operation planning, so these outcomes led to rapid legislative changes in the 2000s.³⁹ In addition to national legislation, many amendments came to effect in line with European Union guidelines.⁴⁰ It is essential to point out that, as with other sectors, the government is trying to make the military more representative of society in terms of the critical ratios already listed. This new open embrace of diversity raises further problems on the subject. Aldred's 2010 study explores in more detail how the military's practices in dealing with same-sex relationships are changing and how the military chaplaincy should facilitate and support these changes, in contrast to previous practices. In a broader sense, this is about the successful transposition of norms already established in (civil) society, such as same-sex partnerships, into the British Army.⁴¹

7. Characterising religious diversity from a Christian perspective

The Church of England carried out a detailed account of the military chaplaincy of all three main forces during its Synod from 2005 to 2010. In terms of numbers, this meant 281 chaplains serving in the active forces, and additionally 183 served as reservists during the survey. Of 464 people, 282 belonged to the Anglican Church, 130 to the Church of Scotland or the Free Church, and 52 people represented Roman Catholics for 183,000, a proportion of 2.5 per thousand (0.0025%).⁴² For the sake of accuracy, apart from chaplains who classify themselves as Jewish, the following Christian denominations were getting represented: Anglican,⁴³ Roman Catholic Church, Methodist Church, the United Board,⁴⁴ Presbyterian,⁴⁵ Elim Pentecostal Church.⁴⁶ In addition to them, as mentioned already, chaplains representing the main world religions were appointed in 2005.⁴⁷ The number of non-Christian soldiers equalled 305 Muslims, 230 Hindus, 220 Buddhists, 90 Sikhs and 56 Jews. So, it is clear that

³⁸ Killian Fox: A Minority Report from the Armed Forces. *The Guardian*, 21 October 2012.

³⁹ The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Equality Act 2006, and the Equality Act 2010.

⁴⁰ Nasar Meer: The Implications of EC Race Equality and Employment Directives for British Anti-discrimination Legislation. *Policy and Politics*, 38, no. 2 (2010). 197–215.

⁴¹ Todd (s. a.): op. cit.

⁴² *Presentation on Military Chaplaincy (GS 1776)*. Church of England, 2018.

⁴³ Namely the Church of England, Church of Ireland, Church in Wales and Scottish Episcopal Church.

⁴⁴ Incorporating the Baptist Church.

⁴⁵ Members of the Church of Scotland and Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

⁴⁶ United Reformed Church, for more information see <https://urc.org.uk/about-us.html>

⁴⁷ "Alongside the existing Commissioned Chaplains and our honorary Jewish Chaplain, Rabbi Malcolm Weisman." Note: Rabbi Reuben Livingstone has become the Senior Jewish Chaplain to HM Armed Forces and AJEX and full-time Reservist in 2012. (Todd [2014]: op. cit. 7.)

despite the low number of clergymen appointed (1 per religion), they provide a better ratio of supporting their believers than Christian community has (Muslim: 0.0033%, Hindu: 0.0043%, Buddhist: 0.0045%, Sikh: 0.01%, Jew: 0.018%). To this, we must add that these chaplains, under their civilian commission, can offer a very different spiritual service from their Christian counterparts in the armed forces, further complicating an already tricky situation.⁴⁸ After 2005, we are therefore witnessing a continuous change towards uniformity. The chaplains of all three ministries are working very closely together, even across denominational lines, which has led to a previously unusual and very high degree of Christian ecumenical cooperation. An excellent example of this is the military chaplaincy of the Army, which underwent an essential process of "convergence" in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In the process, Roman Catholic chaplains were merged into a single organisational unit with those of other churches which had previously had parallel structures and ministries. This change also anticipates the need to set up a "general pastoral ministry" with as few restrictions as possible and as soon as possible.⁴⁹ The same conclusion was reached in a study carried out in 1999, which examined the equality of opportunity for adherents of different religions and the potential for improving the resulting gaps within the military chaplaincy, particularly in terms of meeting the spiritual needs of soldiers. A partial result of the cited research is the demonstration that military chaplains would accept a comprehensive institute "chaplaincy for all souls", caring for all souls equally, regardless of their origin or background.⁵⁰ At the same time, religious diversity does not affect the liturgy itself or its course. Demonstrating the liturgy's strong base, chaplains always and still rely on the Anglican Communion, even when a non-Christian member is at a loss or killed during combat, for instance. Then, of course, the ceremony is performed by a CCM chaplain relevant to the deceased's religion, but he does it according to Anglican Church Beliefs and Practices, which safely seems like an accepted approach to the dedication, testimonial and memory-keeping.⁵¹ Thus, the public's symbolic valuation of military service by and towards society, which is most expressive during repatriation and distinctively based on the Christian ethos, becomes evident.

8. Christians and Muslims, a social segregation phenomenon in the Army

According to Hussain and Ishaq, although the acceptance of religiosity and belief has become essential within the military, they also point to the importance of the fact, as mentioned earlier from different sources, that concerning the vast majority of society, belief no longer plays a particular role.⁵² They based their 2003 study on

⁴⁸ Todd (2014): op. cit. 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 7.

⁵¹ Ibid. 12.

⁵² Asifa Hussain – Mohammed Ishaq: Promoting Equality of Opportunity in the British Armed Forces: A 'White' Perspective. *Defence Studies*, 3, no. 3 (2003). 87–102.

the fact that Muslims represent the most significant religious minority in the army, but this, together with figures from the Church of England, seems to contradict recent ministry figures.⁵³ There are two ways to resolve this conflict. The first is the obvious and simple explanation that in the 15–20 years since the study, Hindus have replaced Muslims as the most populous religious minority in the army. The second option seems perhaps more complicated, whereby one could assume a difference in methodology or interpretation.⁵⁴ The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent series of bomb attacks in London and elsewhere in the UK led to a groundswell of public opinion against the country's Muslim minority, which made the government even more willing to alleviate religious discrimination. This mitigating effort has possessed promoting Muslims in general by filling important positions, both in the civil sector and in the Army, which played a role in the well-known increase in the budget for military chaplaincy in 2005.⁵⁵ Perhaps the most crucial result of enlargement has been the more effortless endorsement and acceptance of minority religions by Christian-majority groups. The whole process made sense, primarily because British Forces started to engage more deployment in conflict situations in non-Christian countries.⁵⁶

9. Afghanistan: Christian chaplains in a Muslim-majority territory

Here, we briefly touch on the difficulties and challenges faced by NATO forces in Muslim-majority countries, particularly the experience of British and US forces in Afghanistan, which is a fascinating projection of the military and, more broadly, social transformations described earlier. It is noticeable that, even with having similar protocols, the official guidance on establishing and maintaining communication with the local population is quite different in the two organisations. It is fair to say that chaplains today increasingly face new demands beyond their prior duties founded on providing faith, pastoral care and ethical guidance to the troops. This phenomenon is particularly true for those turning up in Iraq and Afghanistan. Additionally, it is a well-established practice among the forces of nations involved in a particular deployment, such as Canada, South Africa, Australia and Norway, to use chaplains as religious liaisons in that domain.⁵⁷ Compared to the "base" position, this expanded role presents many contradictions and challenges for American and British chaplains deployed in recent conflicts in Muslim-majority countries in Central Asia.

Here is a supplementary explanation. Let us look at Bordieu's classic sociological delineation of military chaplains and their roles for ease of understanding. According

⁵³ Further research is needed to explore this contradiction, especially given the potential methodological errors.

⁵⁴ We do not address the religious and ethnic definition and quantification in the UK in the absence of space. To find the answer is one point of our further research.

⁵⁵ Asifa M. Hussain – Mohammed Ishaq: Equality and Diversity in the British Armed Forces: Progress, Challenges and Prospects. *Defense and Security Analysis*, 32, no. 1 (2016).

⁵⁶ Hussain–Ishaq (2016): op. cit.

⁵⁷ George Adams: Chaplains as Liaisons with Religious Leaders. *Peaceworks*, 56 (2006).

to Bourdieu's now classic formulation,⁵⁸ military chaplains are "borderline actors" who have to be presented and move at the intersection of two different groups on their margins.⁵⁹ In addition to their traditional role in religious matters, in the transmission of moral values, in pastoral support in the military sense, they have acquired a capacity to transcend physical and geopolitical borders. The state can also use this capability directly to engage with the local population during the mission. After all, this use appears to interfere in the independence of the pastoral and chaplaincy vocation and practice. The state does this in both practical and symbolic terms. An illustrative example of the former is the meetings and negotiations of military chaplains with local clergymen or when they seek to make a moral case for the presence of the British army. Moreover, in a symbolic sense, their presence can be "proof" that the British state stands on solid morale foundations – contrary to the Taliban's claims, for example – and the Monarchy's citizens are ethical people, and the war waged is not strictly speaking against Afghans. Along the same lines, chaplains can play a significant role in providing humanitarian assistance to the local population, demonstrating to the local population their own and the army's morale motivation; and their ability to respect local religious traditions. This attitude seems to play an increasingly important role in missions. By achieving this, considerable help comes from the fact that all clearly and unambiguously recognise their status as non-combatants.⁶⁰ That position will enable them to move more easily among the population and engage more successfully with local people. The effectiveness of this became visible by some military chaplains, who say that their actions have reduced anti-coalition actions in some areas.⁶¹ At this point, a question arises as to how effective a Christian pastor can be in this new role within an organised framework. Also, in 2010, the view emerged within the British Ministry of Defence that the British military should seek to expand its "social and cultural capability". All this by creating a so-called "cultural unit" specialising in the defence sector (another difference with the US military, where units of civilian scientists carry out this task, whereas, in the UK, these specialists would themselves be soldiers). In fact – and once again – all this takes on real significance in the light of increasing social pressure.

In 2010, an important meeting, proposed by the Muslim CCM of the army and organised by the Foreign Office, between David Richards, Chief of the General Staff, and the Helmand Ulema.⁶² During which leading clergymen and church figures expressed the view that British imams should be deployed urgently to Afghanistan, mainly to emphasise the role and presence of Islam in British society. Secondly, to renounce Taliban claims that British Muslims are living under oppression, and thirdly, to educate the non-Christian majority military about Islam itself.⁶³

⁵⁸ Pierre Bourdieu: *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.

⁵⁹ Stacey Gutkowski – George Wilkes: Changing Chaplaincy: A Contribution to Debate over the Roles of US and British Military Chaplains in Afghanistan. *Religion, State and Society*, 39, no. 1 (2011). 111–124.

⁶⁰ Chaplains wear a special and distinguish badge on their uniform.

⁶¹ Gutkowski–Wilkes (2011): op. cit. 112.

⁶² Helmand Province is one of the 34 provinces and also the largest area in Afghanistan.

⁶³ Freedom of Information (FOI) responses released by MOD during 2019.

10. The problem of missions in Muslim environs

In principle, it is unclear what further changes would be needed to ensure more effective mission activities. Although the only imam serving in the British army has made short visits to Afghanistan, it is not clear whether other NATO countries have sent imams. According to some sources, it is inevitable that the religious figure of the military chaplain plays an influential role in even a Muslim environment in which clergy possess high respect under their status, regardless of their religious background.⁶⁴ Such manifestation in itself may be valid,⁶⁵ but the fact is that the solid personal and symbolic representation of Christianity in the Muslim world has a solid historical resonance, which must be considered; and in case of the British, tacitly, with the echo of an oppressive empire. Related to this, the separation of the "religious" and "political" spheres in the more backward areas, which could offer the vision of a return to colonialism to the local masses, still does not seem to pay off. Another important aspect is that intervening should not be deemed as a tool of the much richer and more powerful Western states against the weaker Muslim countries. Therefore, the arising economic and political doubt based on the previous allegation cannot stand the ground and can be dispelled as early and efficiently as possible. It is also not clear whether the scope of the problems discussed so far can be limited to Christian chaplains. While a British Hindu chaplain (CCM) has already made a short but successful visit to Afghanistan, no general conclusions could authorities make from this visit as to the difficulties that a Jewish chaplain (CCM),⁶⁶ for example, would face in such a setting.⁶⁷ For example, according to the Taliban's persuasive propaganda, he would gain the accusation of surveilling for Israel.⁶⁸ Nor is it certain in which direction the force reforms described before should proceed. For example, there is still no consensus on whether the minority representation of the Army's chaplaincy should be based either on permanent chaplains or the currently employed CCMs in the future.⁶⁹ Other questions remain unanswered, such as whether expanding the number of imams during the missions would be welcomed more warmly by the locals or met with suspicion. None of these answers can be ruled out unequivocally. The complexity of the situation is illustrated by Adams's 2006 publication, in which he drew attention to a case where a Special Forces chaplain was repeatedly introduced by his local interpreter as a "Christian mullah", resulting in the Afghans treating him as if he were a local mullah.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Gutkowski-Wilkes (2011): op. cit. 115.

⁶⁵ Investigating the contextuality of the judgment of religious representatives also forms some basis for further research.

⁶⁶ The British Jewish Chaplaincy was formed in 1892 when the first civilian Jewish chaplain was appointed. In 1909, the Army commissioned the first chaplain in 1909.

⁶⁷ "No British Jewish chaplain served in theatre during the operations in Northern Ireland, the Falklands, the Gulf or Afghanistan. A substantial quantity of kosher ration packs was despatched for a small number of Jewish soldiers serving in Afghanistan." (Jonathan Malcolm Lewis: *Jewish Chaplaincy in the British Armed Forces, from its Inception in 1892 until the Present Day*. Doctoral thesis. University College London, 2020. 372.)

⁶⁸ Gutkowski-Wilkes (2011): op. cit. 117.

⁶⁹ The latter role would be unprecedented, although the sending of leaders of the British Muslim community – imams and non-imams – to Muslim-majority countries was one of the British Government's most pressing public diplomatic strategies after 9/11.

⁷⁰ Adams (2006): op. cit. 38.

11. Summary

There is no doubt that military chaplains have a remarkable potential to have a powerful and positive impact on the development of the operational staff's relationship with civilians during missions. However, the normalisation of the relationship between the military and the civilians is still no guarantee that they will succeed in influencing the locals, say, to the extent that they can change their perceptions of the state and society or the nature of the background of those perceptions. It can be argued that their most important task is perhaps still to undertake pastoral care of their own personnel rather than to exercise newly established roles, such as the expansion of the novel role of a religious adviser. Moreover, acting like that poses a serious threat to the retention of a "neutral" pastoral vocation because of excessive political involvement. Not to mention the fact that without adequate training and local knowledge, there would be no point in implementing the extended tasks by default. Experience so far also confirms that not all chaplains have been able to cope with the new circumstances. From a military point of view, the depth of knowledge that chaplains can impart to soldiers on religious issues may be questionable, given that they are not always able to personally assist their units in dealing with the local population.

Further doubt cast on this kind of role extension. In a force that is secularising rapidly, the (re)reinforcement of the religious aspect by official bodies would undoubtedly be a source of further conflict, which would thus have to lead to a change in the character of the military as a whole. At least if somebody looks at it from a Christian perspective. The increase in the number of religious minorities, most notably Hindus and Muslims, which seems to be backed by more political support every year, indicates another source of conflict. As time goes by and their numbers increase, the strengthening of religiousness within the army may become increasingly important. The observer cannot determine where the new approaches and changes will lead. The rapidly changing political determinations alongside military doctrines may shift this towards a truly secular side of the military, or conversely, the next generation of religiosity may become increasingly embedded in the British military. It is safe to say that this means that the British Armed Forces will soon need to prepare for multidimensional problem solving to maintain their effectiveness and readiness unless it is too late to reverse some of the high-impact trends that may cause the Army to adopt additional procedures.

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