

The Commonwealth's Call to Duty

Advancing modern Commonwealth defence opportunities

"A Commonwealth security forum could provide an interesting and potentially useful adjunct to the current global security architecture. At the very least, it would be a useful tool in assessing trends and could give valuable early warning signals of future problems. We cannot have too much dialogue or an excess of information in the era of globalisation. It may just be that the Commonwealth could be coming of age in the right way at the right time. It is a time to be bold."

Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP / Secretary of State for Defence (2010-11)



Why Research Commonwealth Security?

Today the Commonwealth and global security concerns are scarcely mentioned together and yet they have a strong heritage. The Commonwealth works on a myriad of issues, but defence is one area left untapped by policy makers. This report acts as a discussion piece to assess whether there are ways to enhance cooperation in this field to the benefit of all members.

The Commonwealth has great potential to help collectively, given its footfall in every habitable continent, but it requires a more influential role to do so.

Importantly this report is not arguing for the creation of a defence force or security council like NATO. Any such plans are premature. The base from which the Commonwealth starts is modest. Rather it is about finding opportunities to collaborate across the 53 nations through a number of hard and soft military factors. The scope is certainly there.

Areas of development

For the Commonwealth to be relevant in the defence and security realm it must provide opportunities to discuss, understand, and develop responses to a number of fundamental concerns. We have pinpointed seven such areas a Commonwealth security forum would need to consider. These topics are:

- Defence diplomacy
- Interoperability
- Intelligence sharing
- Anti-terrorism
- Humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR)
- Anti piracy
- Military training.

We charted this genesis of Commonwealth defensive action through joint forces of various formulations in Japan, Korea, Malaysia, and Zimbabwe. These events, although little known to the majority of people, provide a useful understanding of what went before.

Japan, 1945

The British Commonwealth Occupying Force (BCOF) at the start consisted of Australia, British India, New Zealand, and the UK troops. This marked the first time that British troops were under full Dominion command.

One leading historian said: "It is highly unlikely that any other groups of forces outside the British Commonwealth could have done it."

Korea, 1951

1st Commonwealth Division (British Commonwealth Forces Korea, BCFK) consisted of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the UK. No other Commonwealth nations agreed to participate.

Notably, Canada were strongly against calling it a Commonwealth force. Britain dismissed this notion stating practical difficulties if foreign troops were included with regards to language, procedure and training.

In Japan, Australia successfully demonstrated that an officer from the Dominions had the ability to command British troops. Britain chose an officer with deep Commonwealth credentials to command the BCFK, while overall control still rested with the Australian commander operating in Japan. This signalled the shift in British thinking since WWII.

Malaysia, 1954

British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve (FESR) initially consisted of Australia, New Zealand, and the UK. The FESR did receive additional Commonwealth help from Fiji and Southern Rhodesia; however, the former at the time remained a British colony, while the latter's foreign policy was governed by the UK.

The term Commonwealth in a military sense was a concept that had a specific meaning. It had a resonance in South-East Asia only with Australia, New Zealand, and the UK the main players, while significant Commonwealth actors in Africa and the Indian sub-continent sat out such multilateral Commonwealth operations.

Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, 1979

Commonwealth Monitoring Force (CMF) constituted of just over 1,500 Commonwealth peacekeepers to monitor the elections between rival factions. This number included 150 Australians, 22 Fijians, 50 Kenyans, and 75 New Zealanders. Britain provided 800 soldiers with some 300 Royal Air Force personnel. It was been argued that despite the small number of troops the CMF was a "soundly-established body of troops" that successfully carried out its objective.

To date, the CMF is the last time a named Commonwealth force has been deployed. In recent conflicts the near majority has involved NATO, UN forces, or US-led coalitions. Major individual Commonwealth actors have participated in these operations, but never under the aegis of a combined Commonwealth force.



Our Recommendations

I: Establish a Commonwealth Security Forum (CSF)



Why have a CSF?

Importantly just because there is currently not a forum does not mean one should exist. A case needs to be made. This must also be compelling. We have set out 12 reasons why a CSF would develop Commonwealth strategic relations.

- Cross-regional - the only security forum that has nations representing all habitable continents
- Increase diplomatic reach of emerging and developing nations
- Soft power projection for developed nations
- Every Commonwealth nation consulted from inception
- Effective Defence Capacity Building opportunities
- Strategic educational benefit
- Enhance conflict prevention measures
- Allow for wider operational discussions such as joint training exercises and interoperability
- Provide a regular and fixed meeting that acts as the backbone for regular contact between Commonwealth nations
- Opportunities as a venue for bilateral private diplomatic & military meetings
- Business-to-Government trade opportunity
- Wider think-tank benefits to propose policy and conduct research.

What would a CSF look like?

- **Design** - Follow example of IISS Dialogues Series. Track record from Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore established 2002.
- **When** - Biennially in line with CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting).
- **Location** - CHOGM to keep costs lower than a stand alone conference.
- **Duration** - Two days initially.
- **Costs** - Projected as low seven figure dollar sum this ranges depending on host nation.
- **Funding** - A combination of private defence industry funds, option of direct ComSec input, host nation, and larger nations.
- **Delivery** - ComSec, host nation of CHOGM, and/or independent think tank.
- **Diplomatic Track** - Track 1.5 is preferable as a blend - Track 1 reserved for official Government delegations and leading Armed Forces personnel. Track 2 includes non-state actors such as think tanks, NGOs and the media.
- **Itinerary** - Keynote sessions, breakout sessions based on topics and private bilaterals/multilaterals.
- **Personnel** - Invite all three branches of the Armed Forces. Chief of Staffs and their Deputies; permanent Defence Ministry teams (e.g. MoD); include Defence Attaches. Defence Secretaries or Ministers for keynotes.

II: Create a Commonwealth Military Scholarship (CMS)

Value

- Deepen ties and interactions between Commonwealth military personnel early in their career. These ties would be carried forward as officers progressed to higher ranks in their respective armed forces.
- Develop stronger bonds and levels of trust and loyalty between Commonwealth officers which feeds into human interoperability.

How

- One mechanism could be through the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC).
- We were told that it would be quite possible to integrate a CMS into the CSC scheme if funding was made available. This could take the form of the existing DfID grant or through new funds from the MoD.
- Given that other Government Departments give or have given grants there would be no reason why the MoD would not be allowed to do likewise.
- CSC said that for around £200,000 seven of its scholarships could be provided.
- How a wider Commonwealth military scholarship could work might well be a possible discussion topic at our proposed security forum.



III: Upscale Commonwealth Officer Exchange Programmes

Value

- Increase of forces interoperability where soldiers from both sides work together learning each other's systems and organisations.
- Better understanding in doctrine and procedures that aids standardisation in building a common set of standards.
- Having the majority of Commonwealth nations enjoying English as a shared language assists with communication at an operational level.
- Interaction with new forces breaks down perceived barriers and fosters trust and goodwill.
- The cost is also low because each side exchanges an exact or similar recruit.
- The major issue relates to quality of the officers. Therefore numerical upscaling must keep reciprocal quality at the forefront of any decision-making.



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Conclusion: Crucial to the understanding of Commonwealth strategic concerns is that we are looking ahead, not to the past. History provides the backdrop, but ultimately solutions to the Commonwealth's pressing defensive problems need progressive and modern architecture to deal with them. The Commonwealth must be better prepared.

As a collection of developed, developing, and emerging economies the Commonwealth can utilise this unique club working in the strategic realm for mutual aid, protection, and security. We see no better way than to commence discussions with a forum of Commonwealth partners. Many lives would certainly benefit and indeed prosper.