6 Factors of General Influence

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The chapters of Part II have given a chronological account of the evolution of the organisation of the Ministry. Part IV will consider, in more depth, the particular issues and problems in each of the main functional areas of groupings within the Ministry. Before turning to this detailed analysis it is first necessary to see whether certain general factors have had significant effects either on the general shape and speed of change in the Ministry or, more specifically, on individual areas within it.

Five such general factors are discussed in this chapter. First, there is the changing position of the UK, coupled with the range and size of its military commitments and their consequences for the range and complexity of the work carried out within the Ministry. Second, there is the all-pervasive matter of finance and the handling of the defence budget, coupled with the extent to which practical realities in these fields may have acted as a constraint on radical organisational change. The third factor is the very size of the Ministry: how far has this been a political and budgetary issue in its own right which has in turn led to intensifying the search for particular organisational solutions. The fourth and fifth factors are of a rather different nature: the one dealing with the relationship between ministers and senior military officers and the question of any changes in the balance between them, and the other dealing with relationships with other Government Departments and within central government as a whole.

(1) THE WORLD SCENE AND THE UK’s PLACE

The decades since 1945 have seen major changes in the balance of power and in the UK’s perception of its place and role in this
Factors of General Influence

changing scene. The main landmarks are easily identified: the UK's position alongside the USA and the USSR in the peace negotiations of 1945; the formation of NATO; the withdrawal from Empire; the extended retention of Treaty obligations in the Far East, the Middle East and the Near East; the development and changing natures of the Commonwealth and the European Economic Community; the 'special' relationship with the USA, including the particular military dimension of nuclear weapons cooperation; the declining but still not wholly extinguished colonial obligations. This is not the place either to explore this complex history and the many reviews of defence policy required to adapt to these changes, or even to consider their consequences for the size, shape and equipment of the Armed Forces. But there are certain factors which can be identified as having very general but at the same time profound effects on the size and shape of the Ministry.

First, for the NATO role successive Governments have considered that the UK, as a major European member and moreover as one in a special position as a nuclear power, should contribute the complete spectrum of military capabilities spanning strategic nuclear and conventional forces, with these forces deployed on the central front, on the flanks, in the maritime roles in the Atlantic, the Channel and the Mediterranean, supplemented by a significant air and amphibious reinforcement capability. Furthermore, in the policy and planning fields it should be able to make a significant and constructive contribution across the fields of strategy, of force levels including disarmament aspects, of logistic rationalisation and of equipment policy. The UK has tried to make its influence felt not only through normal NATO machinery but also both bilaterally with the USA and by initiating special European groupings within a rather flexible European framework.

Second, notwithstanding the withdrawal of forces from many theatres and the dissolution of such Treaty obligations as CENTO and SEATO, HMG still has commitments outside the NATO area scattered round the world, including such sensitive areas as Belize, Cyprus, the Falkland Islands and Hong Kong. This type of global commitment has called, over the decades, for considerable staff resources to be located centrally in the Ministry in what is now the Defence Staff and the associated Defence Secretariats in order to provide political and intelligence assessments, to define appropriate force structures, to draw up contingency plans and to provide either direct control of, or information about any operations all within a