

Book Review: The Transformation of Europe's Armed Forces: From the Rhine to Afghanistan

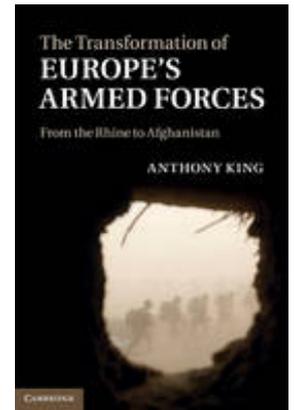
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Matthew Partridge finds **Anthony King's** exploration of the sociology of defence policy to be broad and informative.

The Transformation of Europe's Armed Forces: From the Rhine to Afghanistan. Anthony King. [Cambridge University Press](#). February 2011.

Since the end of the Cold War the reputation of Continental Europe's armed forces has been relatively low. [Jed Babbin](#), former Deputy Undersecretary of Defense, spoke for many in the Pentagon (and even Whitehall) when he quipped, in January 2003, that "going to war without France is like going deer hunting without an accordion. You just leave a lot of useless, noisy baggage behind". However, since 2004 there has been a concerted attempt to further integrate Europe's military forces. Planned British [cuts in defence spending](#), and a U.S President averse to taking unilateral decisions, are likely to further accelerate this process.

In *The Transformation of Europe's Armed Forces: from the Rhine to Afghanistan*, [Professor Anthony King](#) sets out to investigate the strategic context of these changes, and the operational and tactical transformation involved. As a respected sociologist, Professor King argues that European military integration has a wider salience outside the realm of international relations or security studies, because it serves as a metaphor for the wider effects of globalisation and concentration (specialisation) on contemporary politics and society. As he puts it in the Introduction, "the dynamic of localisation and globalisation or concentration and transnationalism was evident among the armed forces, as it was in the commercial and industrial sectors".



King's study is divided into three sections. The opening part, which is by far the shortest, looks at two main strategic issues: the deepening of European military institutions, and their relationship with [NATO](#) – the traditional cornerstone of European defence policy. Although King believes that European integration is now going beyond simply the creation of coalitions, he disagrees that they will be able to, or even should, supersede NATO. Indeed, he contends that "the catalyst of development [for Europe's military forces] will remain NATO and the United States". He also recommends that any further integration "should be situated within a NATO framework".

The next section moves down a level, looking at the operational network of European forces. Unfortunately, King's discussion gets extremely technical with lots of acronyms and references to military manuals. Indeed, chapter six, which deals with operational art, reproduces several military charts. However, King essentially believes that since the 1980s there has been a move away from the Cold War paradigm of massed defensive forces designed to slow down a Soviet invasion, to the creation of rapid reaction groups that can be quickly inserted in a regional, or even global, hotspot.

The final part of the book looks at these groups, focusing on brigade-level tactics. Noting that both the reductions in troop numbers and the move from defensive to offensive doctrines have strengthened the role of Special Forces, such as the British SAS and Paratroopers, King devotes a large part of the section to them. In particular, he examines how such elite brigades use their reputation, and their special status, to maintain high performance in an era when airborne assaults and amphibious landings, their original aims, are relatively rare. King believes that they epitomise the transition from citizen-soldiers, motivated by ideology and patriotism, to skilled professionals, at ease with being "a node in a network organisation".

All of King's conclusions are sensible, and backed up by considerable evidence. However, *The Transformation of Europe's Armed Forces* only partially addresses some of the wider questions underpinning defence integration. In particular, King skirts around the issue of how differing national foreign policy objectives, especially those between Germany and Britain, and divergent tolerances for casualties limit integration. This failure means that his work is more a monograph than a fully-fledged study.

If Anthony King wishes to further explore the sociology of defence policy, he might consider expanding on the

themes he discusses in the all-too-brief final chapter, rather than those of the preceding ten chapters. He would also be advised to spend less time reading briefing books and examining organisation charts, and instead find a few more case studies along the lines of the German failure to prevent the Monastery of Angels in Prizren from being destroyed.

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