

**Forces in Mind Trust Future Insights Workshop
19 November 2024
Prince Philip House London**

Acknowledgements

Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) would like to thank all those who participated in the workshop and Future Agenda for facilitating the discussion.

Introduction

FiMT partnered with Patrick Harris and James Alexander from Future Agenda to deliver a workshop to explore the key societal challenges and opportunities most likely to affect the Armed Forces community in the future and the freedoms and constraints impacting the environment of their support. The workshop built on the [Lifting Our Sights: Beyond 2030](#) foresight report, which examined the impact of future trends on Service personnel and their families as they transition out of the military over the next ten years and beyond.

The purpose of the event was to enable participants, and the organisations they represent, to recognise and explore their role and required potential action, to better deliver support for the Armed Forces community in the future. The intended outcomes included:

- To have explored and identified the needs of the Armed Forces community in 2030 and beyond
- To understand other's and alternative perspectives
- To identify specific areas of opportunity, challenge and action
- To identify the implications of this exploration for attendee's organisations

The event brought together representatives from a range of sectors including central government, the devolved administrations, the Armed Forces, academia and the charity sector.

This report provides a summary of the key findings from the day.

Executive Summary

Approximately 150,000 people are members of the British Armed Forces. Each year, around 16,000 of them leave, many with families, to return to civilian life. Whilst most make a successful transition, easily adapting to their changing circumstance, some struggle to re-establish themselves and their families without the structure that the Armed Forces provide.

The aim of the original *Lifting Our Sights* project was to better understand future trends in order to ensure that transitioning Service personnel and their families have the best possible opportunity to make a successful and sustainable shift to civilian life both now and in the future. The report highlighted the shifts that may impact the transition

experience and identified four priority areas for action (Accurate Perception, Empowering the System, Personalise the Transition Process and Empowered Civilian).

The workshop built on report findings with participants asked to consider and explore the future to identify key insights, implications, actions and recommendations to be able to better deliver support for the Armed Forces community (AFC) over the next ten years.

The world in 2035

The world in 2035 is expected to be markedly different to that of today, and there is a need to both deliver the required existing support to the AFC and evolve it to be fit for purpose in a future world.

There are trends that are considered ‘certainties’, such as the continued shift of global power and influence away from traditional western democratic centres and the UK, to the south and east or significant shifts such as the changing characteristics of conflict, and with it new demands on recruits, new transitioners and a more fluid AFC. These all imply the need for rapid evolution. The external world however is expected to be less predictable and more shocks should be expected. Similarly, the size, shape and role of the AFC will change considerably as well as its place in society. The AFC will necessarily need to become ever more an integrated part of society and not apart from it.

Key insights from workshop discussions

Whilst all the trends identified in *Lifting Our Sights* remain valid, participants considered some to be more relevant to the AFC than others. Those that ranked top for relevance included:

- Changing Characteristic of Conflict
- Shifting Power and Influence
- New Transitioners¹
- Greater Competition
- New Reality
- AI Risk

It should however be noted that whilst these trends came out on top, the trends at the bottom, or those deemed least relevant to the AFC, such as Paid for Health Care and Digital Harms may be ‘blind spots’ for participants.

Building on the *Lifting Our Sights* report, additional trends or insights suggested by participants included:

- Increased Warfare (World War 3)
- Polarisation and Populism Leading to Civil Unrest
- Rise in Social Activism
- Powerful Elite

¹ New Transitioners refers to the changes in demographic, attitude and behaviours of those who leave the military in 2030 and beyond. Further details on each of the trends can be found in the report [here](#).

- Increased Innovation
- AFC Blurred and Porous Boundaries
- Changing Interpersonal Communication and Engagement
- Meaningful Employment
- Decline in Charitable Activity
- Fluctuations in the UK Economy
- Impact of the Military-Industrial Complex

The four priority action areas identified in *Lifting Our Sights of Accurate Perception*, Empowering the System, Personalise the Transition Process and Empowered Civilian were also still considered valid. The challenges related to Accurate Perception have arguably grown, as societal polarisation, misinformation, a military charity-sector echo-chamber and access to media reduce the ability to control the narrative and evolve it from unhelpful short-hands such as ‘mad, bad and sad’ or ‘heroes’. Related to this was a need for the AFC to break out of their own echo-chamber, and to think of themselves (in almost all situations) as first civilian (or at least a member of civil society) and second a member of the AFC.

Two additional priority action areas were put forward. The first, ‘Resilience and Preparedness’, was in effect a pre-emptive response to the increasing tensions in the world and as a result the expected shocks and conflict that may result. It was notable that, alongside increased international conflict, civil unrest at home was expected by many. The second, ‘Armed Forces Not in Isolation’, speaks to the increased need for the AFC to be part of, and embedded in, society. A number of participants believed that this would require a deliberate and consistent shift in culture, including by the Government and Armed Forces leaders.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Beyond the specific recommendations outlined in the record of discussion below, three interconnected themes were apparent:

1. Increased coordination
2. Clear accountability
3. A holding to account against delivering to the [Armed Forces Covenant](#).

Improvements in these areas would go some way toward tackling persistent issues in the AFC such as better controlling the AFC narrative, ensuring practice aligns with policy, sharing of data, and decision-making as a collective. Taken together, and if acted upon consistently over time, these perhaps offer an alternative pathway for improving support for the Armed Forces community.

Going forward, these factors and discussions could be part of the contextual foundation of future policy deliberations and help shape subsequent strategies for support.