

Buying Guns and Butter

Comparing public procurement in military and non-military contexts

INTRODUCTION

- Institutional theory suggests organisations, economic sectors, and societies have specific guidelines and belief systems (logics) that guide their behavior.
- Distinctive institutional logics may face pressures to conform and become homogenous (institutional isomorphism). Or they may resist (isomorphic paradoxes).
- Public procurement guidelines (or logic) confronts both military and non-military government departments and can be a potential isomorphic pressure that affects distinctive institutional logics.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the similarities and differences between military and non-military public procurement?

METHODOLOGY

- Comparative case studies of four major UK government procurement projects.
- Documents & texts analysed qualitatively using NVivo.

RESULTS

	Queen Elizabeth programme	Armoured Cavalry 2025	Thameslink programme	Intercity Express Programme
Item being procured	aircraft carriers	armoured vehicles	commuter trains	inter-city trains
Public policy	foreign	foreign	domestic	domestic
Regional politics	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Technophilia	No	Yes	No	Yes
Satisfactory levels of competition	No	Yes	Yes	No
Difficult to trace accountability	Yes	Yes	No	No

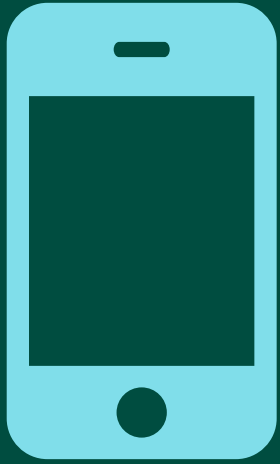
CONCLUSION

- Military procurement is a response to very different public policy requirements, although the regional economic and political discourse can be similar in the military and non-military sector.
- Technological biases adversely affecting procurement performance and specifications limiting competition desired by public procurement may or may not occur in military as well as non-military procurement.
- Accountability and decision-making is dispersed and distinctive in the military procurement organisation.

There are more similarities than differences between military and non-military public procurement.



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Source of data	QEC	Armoured vehicles	Thames link	IEP
Department (MoD/DfT)	5	9	4	6
National Audit Office	20	15	6	2
Govt. Major Projects Portfolio	7	7	7	7
Parliamentary select committee	8	6	4	4
Hansard (parliament debates, written responses)	12	40	6	21
Newspaper	2688	*	*	*
Trade press	*	*	*	*
Interviews	*	*	*	*

* Data not yet collected

Possible implications:

- The institutional logic of the military sector has resisted the conforming pressures of public procurement to some extent (the accountability logic).
- Non-military public procurement can also express resistance to certain aspects of public procurement logics.
- Perhaps a new logic is required to reconcile beliefs and guidelines on public procurement of complex product systems.

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