

BRITISH DEFENCE - THE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF'S LECTURE 2000

BY GENERAL SIR CHARLES GUTHRIE GCB LVO OBE ADC GEN

The RUSI seem to be making a habit of wheeling me out as the warm up act for the Christmas party. I'm not sure whether this is supposed to flatter me, or just ensure that the auditorium is full if only with those expecting a decent drink afterwards. I am in the twilight of my Army career – although I'm not quite ready to ride off into the sunset just yet, my charger is being groomed and saddled. At this stage many might succumb to the desire to air imagined grievances, bang on about their particular hobbyhorses, or to look backwards over their careers. Interesting though that might be, I do not intend to fall into that self-indulgent trap and provide my own obituary. I intend to look forward to the challenges which face the British Armed Forces as we change and evolve to meet the demands of the likely geopolitical environment of the next decade.

A TURBULENT GLOBAL VILLAGE

What will that geopolitical landscape look like? If the ten years or so since the end of the Cold War are anything to go by then the world will continue to be an unstable place with some deep-rooted problems. There is a strange paradox that in a time of increased globalisation there is also fragmentation and marginalisation of less affluent nations, and communities within nations.

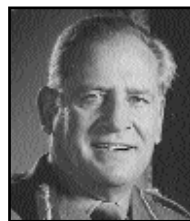
Globalisation sees the world shrinking, and distance matters less. There is a global financial market. What happens in Seoul, Tokyo, Jakarta or Delhi affects London and New York within hours. There is global information: 170 countries are now on the Internet. There were 17 million users in 1997; now there are now over 100 million. Globalisation means that there is unprecedented readiness to co-operate internationally. There is increasing importance of groupings, both military and civilian. The United Nations, NATO, the European Union, and the Organisation for Security

and Co-operation in Europe are all growing in size. New countries want to join. Elsewhere there is a proliferation of regional groups such as the Economic Community of West African States, the Organisation of African Unity, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and so on.

In 1990 – involvement, more likely than to have been described as interference, in the internal affairs of other nations happened only in very exceptional circumstances. Now there is a greater sense of global responsibility for what happens in the Balkans, in Kosovo, the Middle East, the Indian Continent and Africa. We feel responsible about ethnic cleansing and genocide. But at the same time as globalisation there is fragmentation.

In so many corners of the globe there is a resurgence of nationalism and secessionist trends – fragmentation. Even in the United Kingdom we see evidence of this. It's not just happening in the Balkans, in Indonesia or in Central Asia. In the last 10 years the United Nations have recognised almost 30 new countries. Far from stability through ever-closer union, in the world today we face instability through fragmentation. At times this is not solely nationalistic fragmentation but often religious fragmentation as well.

There are other sources of tension and conflict – often based on need or greed. In parts of Africa for example there are countries with little or no water and food is in scarce supply. Previously countries such as Kenya, which once exported food to the whole world, can now barely feed herself.



The outgoing Chief of the Defence Staff outlines the increasing demands that are being placed on a changing British Armed Forces in a global environment characterised by ethnic conflict, terrorism and international crime. Remarks given at RUSI, 19 December 2000.

Then there is greed. For instance, in Africa many of the conflicts stem from the thirst for diamonds which in turn fuel the arming of the combatants as they fight for control of the diamond areas. We saw this many years ago in what was then the Congo and Angola, and it certainly fuels the current evil in Sierra Leone. The profits of the drug trade also fuel conflict. Although the Taliban have recently announced their intention to eradicate poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, some 80 per cent of all heroin sold in the United Kingdom originates there. The profits from drug trafficking continue to sustain internal strife and terrorism in Asia and a similar picture could be painted about the cocaine route from South America.

Poverty is rife and the divisions between the haves and the have-nots are all too plain to see. The trends of globalisation and fragmentation are exacerbated by the worsening inequalities of wealth, and the poorer countries are being increasingly marginalised in world affairs. Poverty also leads to poor life expectancy: for a male child born in Sierra Leone it is 46 years, compared with 75 in the United Kingdom. With the exception of South Africa, nearly half the population of every sub-Saharan African country is under 14 years old – in the United Kingdom only 20 per cent are under 14.

In our changing world, nationalism, sectarianism, poverty and greed are likely to continue to foster a spirit of distrust in many places. This will not necessarily lead to major wars between nation states but it is very likely to generate friction between sub-regional groupings, sects, or factions with few clearly defined battle lines between them. This leads to an altogether more complex scenario than existed during the superpower stand-off of the Cold War.

Then we were fundamentally defensive in nature. As the defenders we could choose our battlefield, and in our case we chose the Norwegian Sea, the Hanover Plain and the airspace above them both. I commanded at just about every level in Germany and came to know the Plain as well as I know Hyde Park. The enemy had to come to us on ground of our choosing. This is no longer the case. We must now go to the trouble spot and take on any potential adversary often on ground of his choosing. This is more demanding, more complex and can be every bit as dangerous. We need to be able to influence the outcome through direct action across a broad spectrum of military capabilities to match the broad spectrum of future conflict.

At one end of that spectrum lies true intensity warfare such as we experienced in the Gulf and could have encountered in the Balkans if a forced entry into Kosovo had been required. The fact that these conflicts were limited in time or regional effect made them no less intense – certainly not to the sailor, soldier, or airman in contact with the enemy. Similarly the numerous border disputes and clashes that abound are intense at the scene of action although they would not normally be classified as high intensity warfare. Further down the scale come internal conflicts such as experienced in Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo and of course in the Middle East.

Such crises have the potential to explode in spectacular fashion although they would be judged by many to be limited. The potential for escalation is not in doubt. There is a proliferation in weapons of mass destruction: nuclear, chemical and biological. Terrorism can export a limited regional conflict to the international stage – for example the attack on the USS *COLE*, or Islamic extremists operating virtually world-wide. No longer is the battlefield an organised place with front lines and rear areas. It is confused, fluid and multi-dimensional. Asymmetric warfare may call for a completely new approach from conventional navies, armies and air forces, and governments will also want their forces to engage in the fight against well-armed international criminals and drug cartels. There is also another kind of threat to security, which was manifested by the attack on the Tokyo subway. Nobody should be complacent. I myself am surprised similar attacks have not happened elsewhere in the world.

BRITISH ARMED FORCES: A FORCE FOR GOOD

The fragmentation and instability in the world has led to a dramatic increase in international involvement in peace support operations. In the 34 years since the first UN peace-keeping force, supervising the withdrawal of British, French, and Israeli forces from Egypt in 1956 to 1990, there were 13 UN peace support missions. In the 10 years since 1990 there have been 40 UN operations of which 14 are still in being today. In the same 10 year period there have been another 14 non-UN peace keeping operations many of which have been mounted by coalitions of the willing. For example the Implementation Force in Bosnia, INTERFET in East Timor or the West African ECOMOG operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

FOCUS – BRITISH DEFENCE

Internationalisation of military operations, whether it be peace keeping or war fighting as in the Gulf is a fundamental part of the geopolitical security environment – multi-national forces are here to stay.

As well as fighting in conflicts, the Forces need to be involved in conflict prevention. This means acting in good time, deploying in strength perhaps to prevent a crisis becoming a conflict, but there are other things we can do as well. Training Teams have been particularly successful in helping developing countries produce accountable, professional forces properly under control of legitimate governments who will be less likely to employ child soldiers, commit atrocities or mount military coups. Our Defence Attachés have an important role to play in maintaining bilateral relationships and promoting Defence Diplomacy. The training we offer to foreign servicemen in this country also goes a long way to contributing to conflict prevention through increasing awareness and inculcating a spirit of professionalism, and respect for the rule of international law.

This is what I understand as being a force for good – helping create a stable security environment by a number of means, through operations, training and defence diplomacy, but above all by maintaining combat effectiveness. Combat effectiveness is not about cuddling babies and delivering tea, although I can understand why we should become involved in the softer areas of peace-keeping. It shows publicly, for example, that the Armed Forces are doing a worthwhile job when not employed

training for, or engaged in operations and that the Defence Budget is being spent wisely as a tangible force for good.

There is also a need for forces to take part in the post-conflict resolution process by ensuring that the security situation remains as benign as possible. Once the initial military task is over, the lion's share of responsibility must pass to the international community and their experts in civil affairs and administration. There are seldom, if ever, purely military solutions, although there is plenty we can do to help in those early, tense post-conflict days. We saw in Bosnia, and then again in Kosovo, that there is a desperate need for the rapid deployment of civil police, judges, prison warders, and other aspects of civil administration to make sure that trust is rebuilt in the post-conflict era.

There is also a need for reconstruction, restoration of essential services such as water and power, and of course the rebuilding of logistic infrastructure to get a region back on its feet quickly. The sooner stability is seen to pay dividends and produce an enhanced quality of life, the sooner the previous combatants are likely to eschew criminal violence as a means to their ends. This is not a task for servicemen although many people would like to think it is. Yes we can help, particularly with early restoration of essential services and the repair of bridges and the like but so too can construction companies and non-government institutions. Our primary role is to create and maintain the stability within which these other functions and organisa-



*The C-17 seen in RAF colours will enhance the UK's strategic lift capabilities when they enter service.
(Courtesy Boeing)*

tions can flourish. This is no small task but it has to be done properly or we risk the military effort being wasted and a dependency culture growing in which large numbers of garrison forces are required to keep control. The international community needs to co-ordinate far better than they do the civil organisations required pre- and post- conflict. I sometimes despair how governments, and I think our government is something of an exception in this, do so little to plan and co-ordinate post-conflict civilian implementation in the same meticulous way the military plan their operations.

ENHANCING DEPLOYMENT CAPABILITIES

The conclusion I draw from this spectrum of activity in which British Forces could be engaged is the need for flexible, deployable forces capable of operating with allies in the worst case scenario - the high intensity end of the conflict spectrum. That is what we configured the British Forces for in the *Strategic Defence Review*. Indeed, it is what we have been doing with conspicuous success in recent years. I firmly believe that our operational success owes much to the intellectual excellence we have created in both our Joint Staff College and our Joint Doctrine Centre at Shrivenham. Over the last ten years we have developed a coherent joint doctrine for expeditionary operations in the modern world. It has proved to be a cornerstone of our success and we will continue to build upon it.

The emphasis on deployability was fundamental to the Review and our Joint Rapid Reaction Force, the JRRF, concept was demonstrated in our response to the deteriorating situation in Sierra Leone last May. Then, within 4 days of the need to deploy being recognised, and within 48 hours of the order being given, we had the main elements of the Spearhead battalion, the First Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, complete in theatre together with Chinook helicopters and appropriate logistic support. The Amphibious Readiness Group, a fully supported Royal Marine Commando, embarked on HMS *OCEAN* arrived shortly afterwards as did HMS *ILLUSTRIOUS* with her escorts and air group of Harriers from RAF Strike Command's Joint Force. Altogether over 5,000 personnel from all three Services were deployed to West Africa for the operation – the largest British force to be deployed on a purely national operation since the Falklands War. They stabilised the local situation, allowed a successful evacuation of entitled personnel, and secured the airfield until the UN reinforcement plan

was complete. And of course, such a force remains on offer to the UN if required although we would, as is usual in these cases, retain the right to decide to deploy or not. We have since exercised the Amphibious Ready Group in Sierra Leone as a further demonstration of our deployable capability and of our commitment to that troubled part of West Africa. We will exercise more elements of the Rapid Reaction Force in a major joint, combined exercise in Oman later next year.

The British Forces are well placed to be an extremely effective force in the new geopolitical environment. But the reconfiguring process is not over yet. We still need to bring the new Roll-On, Roll-Off ferries into service and to receive the C-17s needed to complete our enhanced strategic lift capability. Importantly, we still have to bring the Army up to the manning figures anticipated under the Review, and we must ensure delivery of the full Joint Rapid Reaction Force capability at the right level of readiness. Operational commitments have slowed us down on this important aspect of our future force structure. That said, the demonstration of capability in Sierra Leone, although at the lighter scale of Reaction Force deployment, was a good indicator of what we can achieve today. We remain on course to deliver the SDR even if it will take rather longer than we envisaged.

There are significant challenges ahead for the Services as we fight to maintain combat effectiveness in a changing world. The challenge revolves around securing sufficient funding, equipment issues, personnel issues, and ensuring we are not swamped by the gathering tide of legislation. All of these challenges play out in an environment of public perception and the relationship between the Services and the Media has a vital role to play in generating that perception.

TACKLING PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

Today few people in the media or in politics have any real experience of the military. Indeed very few people in the country at large have any first hand knowledge of the Forces, and this is increasing as fathers and grandfathers with wartime or national service experience fade away. The result is that for the majority of the population, most if not all of their knowledge of the Forces comes from what they hear or see in the media. It is important to me, therefore, that what they read and see is accurate and placed in the right context. In the Ministry of Defence, our Ministers do under-

stand the pressures we work under and have been extremely helpful in promoting our cause and forthright in their defence of our military ethos in the face of some stiff opposition.

I do believe it is important that senior officers such as myself talk to the media and ensure our message gets across. There is a fundamental role for the Chiefs of Staff to promote defence in a proactive way through regular briefings and interviews. Sometimes the message does not appear as we would like it to, but I think we have a duty to inform the public, who are interested, supportive, but lack military experience and knowledge. Some think it is a high risk course for members of the service to talk to the media. I think care has to be taken but it has to be encouraged in this the 21st Century, and one thing I feel sure about, the clock is not going to be put back in the foreseeable future. We also need to get our message across and to generate the correct perception if we are to secure the right level of funding and to attract the right people into the Armed Forces.

ENSURING WELL FUNDED PLANS

The *Strategic Defence Review* came to conclusions about the kind of forces that this nation will require for the future. We are implementing the Review but our plans need to be properly funded. Prices do not stand still, estimates made two or three years ago, when seen in the light of hard operational experience, are unlikely to be accurate, but the policy remains the same. Our requirements for people and equipment have if anything increased in the light of that experience.

The end of the Cold War generated what was referred to as the peace dividend and we in the United Kingdom reduced our Armed Forces by some 33 per cent. Defence spending fell over successive years to the lowest percentage of GDP since the inter-war period. That trend we reversed in a modest way in this year's spending review. But we still have to make sure that these hard-won funds are put to best use. There is still intense pressure on the operating budget. We have coped thus far, but

goodness it has been difficult, and we cannot keep on doing more and more for less and less. No one can expect us to keep this up. The modest improvement in this year's spending review was of great value as it showed that the trend in defence expenditure in this country is not remorselessly downwards. However, in order to meet the security and operational challenges I have outlined I am certain that more will be required.

Another challenge we face is the impact of technology and its associated cost. The modern forces required for the roles that I mentioned earlier need to be at the forefront of technology. Otherwise they will simply not be credible. Military technology is evolving at a breakneck pace and those that get left behind will quickly become obsolete. There is however another paradox here. Increasing reliance on technology has led to the perception that forces can engage in technological combat with little or no loss of life. This is a dangerous perception as is reliance on the so called 'silver bullet'. Many of the areas of potential conflict do not possess forces

to engage in high technology combat. Theirs is an altogether more traditional, and bloodier, form of warfare. So as well as highly technical forces, we still need to be able to engage in the traditional types of combat where weight of weapons on target and overwhelming force is important. We do have to face the unpleasant and very regrettable fact that however much we try to avoid it servicemen do get killed on operations. Of course we need to reduce those risks but that will almost certainly require greater resources which takes me back to my last point.

Frequent operational experience also demonstrates equipment inadequacies and emphasises the need for upgrade programmes but the reality is that we need a constant flow of new equipment across the spectrum of military activity to maintain our edge. Coupled with the need for highly technical equipment is the need for capable and highly motivated young men and women to operate it.

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*THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE AND DIVERSE
MANPOWER*

This brings me on to a major challenge, and that is the reducing pool of young people available to be recruited into the Services. Manning is the single most critical element to shaping the Armed Forces of the 21st Century. Defence since the end of the Cold War has been a shrinking business, which to some extent has provided a negative psychological context for those contemplating joining the Armed Forces. A buoyant market place, a demographic dip of some 6 per cent in the next 30 years, and a perceived reduction in the more intangible benefits and values of our Defence business is making it increasingly hard to recruit and retain both the number and quality of people we need. And such is the nature of the Services that we have to recruit young people.

We had aimed to achieve the right mix of skills and numbers in the Armed Forces by 2005 but it now looks as if the Army are unlikely to get there until 2008. They are some 8,000 personnel under strength although in the other two Services the picture is brighter. The Royal Navy is about 1,000 personnel below strength, and although the Royal Air Force have reached their manning levels projected under the Review, there is a significant problem with retaining enough fast jet pilots. The consequences of these shortages are always severe but in the operational environment of the last 18 months they become critical.

We will need able, intelligent, and skilled servicemen and women in the future who properly reflect all sections of society. And I do mean all sections of society. We have come a long way on ethnic minority recruiting but there is still a lot further to go. Achieving the right balance will take time – today about 1.3 per cent of the Services come from the ethnic minorities, which make up some 7 per cent of the overall national population. Of course the large cities, particularly from the Midlands northwards, are rich recruiting grounds

for the Services and in some areas the ethnic minorities represent between 15 and 20 per cent of the population and this figure is set to increase. There is a wealth of talent out there and quite apart from the moral issue of treating people in an equal fashion there is a practical side to our policy. We want talented youngsters and there are many in the ethnic minorities who would bring much to the Services and in return have rewarding careers.

Our demanding overall requirement for manpower will require innovative and flexible solutions. For instance, we may consider greater use of non-regular assets (not just Reserves but use of civilian contractors, even in some operational circumstances), we need to place a premium on design of equipment which is less manpower intensive and also significantly reduce wastage in training. We will also face the reality that to compete in the market place for the quality we need, we will have to maintain comparability in terms of pay and conditions of service with the private sector.

Some have suggested that the answer to our needs may lie in opening up more combat roles to women. At present about 8 per cent of our total trained strength are women and they fulfil some very important roles. The Navy have 73 per cent of posts

open to women, the Army 70 per cent and the Royal Air Force 96 per cent. The major areas of exclusion are in cap-badged units of the infantry, Royal Marines and RAF Regiment, the Royal Armoured Corps and submarines. We have taken an incremental approach to widening the roles for women in the Services and are currently conducting a study into their suitability for close combat roles. I am not sure that the nation is ready for such a step yet, but from my perspective we must ensure that nothing, I repeat nothing, damages the combat effectiveness of the British Armed Forces. The Chiefs of Staff have a duty to recommend to the government how to produce the best operational capability for the nation. We will have to see what conclusions the study draws, but I stress the Chiefs of Staff are not in the business of designing Armed Forces for the good times. We have to advise what will work

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when the conditions are tough, dangerous and frightening. When the time comes, if the Chiefs of Staff advice upsets those who seek equality as an end in itself then so be it.

CONSTRAINTS ON COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS

Another area where combat effectiveness could be under threat is in the raft of legislation we face today: Health and Safety at Work, Working Time Directives, Human Rights Bill, and Armed Forces Discipline Acts. As things stand, nothing we have done so far has had a detrimental effect on operational capability on its own. Even the acceptance of homosexuals did not turn out to be the major issue that some thought it would be. Personally, I never believed it would be a problem and I'm pleased to see that it has turned out to be a non-issue. However, we do have to be on our guard and keep an eye on the cumulative effect of all of these changes, which might begin to erode the ethos of service and sacrifice. I do think the uniqueness of the Services is not always well understood and the modern concern for the rights of the individual sometimes have to be sacrificed in the military for the collective good of the team. Some countries have been less successful than us in preserving this quintessential difference between the military and civilians. I understand why they have been forced down this path, but feel their forces are the poorer for it. There is a culture of risk aversion developing in society which is anathema to servicemen – we are not foolhardy but our profession requires a degree of decisiveness, flair, and courage which sits badly with some of the more restrictive practises of modern employment legislation.

And goodness what a litigious nation we are becoming. I was surprised to see that policemen involved in the Hillsborough disaster were awarded compensation for the horrors they had to cope with. I don't doubt the very real problems that can give rise to post-traumatic stress disorder. The horrors of war are very real but if we find ourselves paying compensation to those in the Services who have to face them we will be setting a precedent from which it will be difficult to row back in later years. There are a few of us in this room tonight who might have earned a bit on the side under any such

scheme. But what really concerns me about the creeping advance of litigation is that it will breed a cautious group of leaders who may step back from courageous decisions for fear that they will be pursued through the courts if it all goes wrong. Could we one day see a subaltern being sued by his platoon for making a decision, perhaps in the heat of battle, which subsequently turns out to have been misjudged and resulting in death or injury?

Our Defence Ministers do understand our position and have been robust in the defence of our case during the recent European debate on ending employment discrimination on grounds of age and disability. I fully understand that those proposing this aspect of employment law were acting with good intentions and for entirely laudable aims. But if left unchecked the impact would have had a detrimental effect on the Forces by insisting that disabled people had a right to serve. We need to guard against such ill-conceived ideas in future but the fact that some thought they should apply to the Forces is a reflection of that lack of awareness of military issues, which I mentioned earlier.

I don't blame them, but they must understand that military life is, and should be, different. Training for, or taking part in, battle is not like going to the office. If we hamstring our fighting Services with inadequate funding, poor equipment, under-manning and inappropriate legislation then we will create a generation of sailors, soldiers and airmen who are little more than a gendarmerie. All symbolism and no substance. They will certainly not be made of the stuff that the British Forces are today and what our country expects them to be like. Forces which in my time as CDS have undertaken over forty operations in some 20 countries. Forces which are looked up to around the world as epitomising skilled professionalism. Forces who make a real difference be it in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor or Sierra Leone. Forces which have made me extremely proud to have been their Chief of Defence Staff. Forces for who combat effectiveness should always be their touchstone. □