



# British Defence in a Changing World

*Jock Stirrup*

*Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup is Chief of the Defence Staff. This article is drawn from RUSI's Annual Chief of the Defence Staff Lecture, which he delivered on 4 December 2006*

Before looking to the future of British Defence, it is useful to recall some important lessons from the recent past. On the night of 20 March 2003, Lieutenant Commander Finn, a senior pilot on 845 squadron, was leading nine Sea King Mark 4s in an opposed assault on the Al Faw peninsula in Iraq. It was a tough proposition. The ambient light conditions and the general mayhem seriously reduced the effectiveness of the crews' night vision goggles. Junior pilots referred to the resulting disorientation as 'the green hell'. But Finn and his colleagues had trained extensively in the demanding conditions of Norway. The connection between the arctic and the desert may not seem obvious, but it was the skills acquired in the most testing environments that saw 845 squadron through that night. Those, and the innovative use of the technology in the Sea King Mark 7. Designed for airborne surveillance and control, it played a key role in bringing coherence to the confused land picture – a wholly unforeseen, but invaluable, use of the system.

That same night, Colonel Buster Howes was leading his 42 Commando into battle in the Al Faw. He alas sustained twelve casualties within eleven minutes of H-Hour in the loss of a CH-46 helicopter. And on 23 March 2003, his unit came under fire from a battery of 130mm towed guns. Through the first operational use of the 'Arthur' weapon locating radar, they identified the firing point. A Sea King Mark 7 tracked the enemy battery's hasty withdrawal, and passed the information to a Phoenix UAV ground control station. Targeted by the UAV, coalition aircraft destroyed the battery.

Jumping forward from Telic 1 to Telic 6, Lieutenant Colonel Woodham was commanding the newly formed brigade surveillance company in MND(SE). He and his team did a superb job in combining a whole suite of information gathering technology with the human intelligence agencies to provide critical information to the commander during high intensity operations. Lt Col Woodham had an impressive operational background. But he also had extensive technological expertise, gained at the Royal Military College of Science and from his time working in the Directorate of Equipment Capability. Together these enabled him to combine people and technology to create success in extremely demanding conditions.

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Lieutenant Colonel Beaton, Royal Army Medical Corps, was also on Telic 6 – his second stint in theatre. He commanded the field hospital, which was the most



A British soldier stands guard near a burning vehicle after a blast that targeted their patrol south of Basra, 29 December 2006. *Photo by REUTERS/Atef Hassan*



advanced ever deployed by UK forces. It incorporated an intensive care unit and a surgical department, as well as – for the first time – a CT scanner. Colonel Beaton's highly trained personnel, utilizing state of the art equipment, undoubtedly saved many lives.

Meanwhile, in November 2005, Major Nigel Cribb deployed to Pakistan in command of 59 Independent Commando Squadron Royal Engineers. Although the immediate relief effort had provided food and shelter to those affected by the devastating earthquake there, winter was fast approaching and more had to be done quickly. Major Cribb's squadron therefore built better shelters, restored power, and repaired schools and medical facilities, all in extremely challenging conditions. It is no exaggeration to say that their outstanding work saved numerous lives.

In Afghanistan, there have been many stories of the difficult fighting that took place there in 2006. Fighting where young soldiers, such as Lance Corporal Jackson, had to lead even younger soldiers through personal example under fire in places such as Sangin; where a wounded Lance Corporal Hartley found himself the only JNCO and still-functioning medic treating colleagues caught in a minefield; where Lance Corporal Bradshaw covered 300 metres of open ground under enemy fire to assist a wounded platoon sergeant; and from where there are numerous other stories of coolness, determination, professional skill and astonishing bravery.

Bravery epitomized by Squadron Leader Woods, who time and again took his Chinook, alongside others, into exposed positions under enemy fire, set a superb example of air-land co-operation.

This is an example more than matched by Wing Commander Sammy Sampson, whose squadron of Harriers was called to support a ground engagement in northern Helmand on 30 April 2006. During the course of the fight, the continual noise of fifty calibre fire, mortar rounds and RPG hits drowned out effective communication from the ground. Having trained as a forward air controller with the US Marines, Wing Commander Sampson took over responsibility for target identification and

attack clearance. Throughout the subsequent confused and intense engagement, the effect of the Harriers proved decisive.

But this is only one side of the story in Afghanistan. The work of 28 Regiment Royal Engineers, who have been building up the momentum of development in Lashkar Gah, and now further afield, cannot be forgotten. They have been making a real difference to the people of Helmand province, not just through the construction that they have underway, but also through the rapidly increasing employment opportunities they are creating for the Helmandis. Theirs is the UK's main effort, and the skill, training and courage of the Royal Engineers has been fundamental to the UK's strategic progress.

### ***This combination of numbers, quality, technical capabilities and realistic, demanding training puts the UK firmly in the premier league of military forces***

These are all interesting – and in many ways humbling – vignettes from recent and ongoing operations. But apart from representing an opportunity to laud the performance of UK service personnel, there is of course another point. And that is, over the past five years, UK officers in all three services have faced challenges across the full spectrum of conflict – high-end war fighting, peacekeeping, reconstruction and development, capacity building, humanitarian assistance, and more besides. And the UK's forces have met those challenges successfully – the secrets of their success being high quality people leveraging the benefits of extensive training and modern technology. Had any one of these elements been allowed to slip, it would not have been possible to achieve all that has been achieved. It is this combination of numbers, quality, technical capabilities and realistic,

demanding training that puts the UK firmly in the premier league of military forces.

### **Current Challenges**

The events of the past five years have shown beyond doubt why it has been necessary to be in that premier league. Some may ask whether there is a need to continue this into the future. Or, indeed, whether a changing world will mean that the essential characteristics of a premier league military will also change. In examining these questions, we have to recognize that 9/11 highlighted, as nothing else had done, the shifting global security dynamic that was already evident before 2001. The trends had been identified, and indeed reflected in the Strategic Defence Review. But suddenly, we had to refocus urgently on the strategic risks we faced. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; the existence of failed and failing states; and the spread of international terrorism: all of these would challenge even further the UK's security and prosperity. And subsequent events have only served to bear out that analysis.

But the world does not stand still. Since 9/11, the UK has developed a better understanding of the factors which might complicate the global security environment in the future. To an extent, these exacerbate the challenges already faced. But worryingly, they also pose potential risks in themselves. None come as any surprise, or is particularly new. But the scale of the various factors, and the ways in which they could inter-relate, paint a worrying picture.

Climate change and growing competition for scarce resources are together likely to increase the incidence of humanitarian crises. The spread of desert regions, a scarcity of water, coastal erosion, declining arable land, damage to infrastructure from extreme weather: all this could undermine security. The areas most at risk – the Middle East, South Asia and the Sahara belt – are already prone to instability; and they are strategically important to the UK. Hence, there is a need to act where such developing crises can be prevented. But we must also consider our response should prevention fail.

And that response will itself be increasingly challenged. Alongside the bleaker physical environment that has been depicted will come wider availability of commercial technology with military applications. So those who have a stake in instability, those who feed on chaos and suffering, will be more capable than ever before. The UK's Armed Forces will face growing sophistication not just amongst other militaries but also amongst non-state actors.

And UK forces will be operating in an environment where its opponents are increasingly likely to have access to weapons of mass destruction. Whilst the case of Iraq has made some people suspicious of such claims, it would be foolish – even irresponsible – to let that incident cloud the issue. The fact is, maintaining a technological edge over potential adversaries will become ever harder.

This has implications for the way the UK structures, equips and trains its services. New technologies require new ways of thinking. We will have to continue to adapt in order to be able to use those technologies effectively. In particular, we will need to take advantage of the pace that new technologies allow: speed will continue to be a defining characteristic of successful military operations.

In parallel with today's threats – and alongside this evolving physical and technological landscape – the UK expects social, economic and demographic trends to exacerbate the spread of international terrorism and insurgent activity. A growing global population under the age of thirty is likely to continue its migration to urban centres. But it seems unlikely that it will in all cases thereby satisfy its social and economic aspirations.

And as mentioned, these trends are not independent. The UK expects them to interact in complex ways to change the strategic context in which it operates. To take just one example, it has already been seen that more effective and more widespread communications technology has dramatically increased the opportunities for disaffected and insurgent groups to spread global propaganda.

Now all of this is reasonably apparent from an analysis of current trends. But we should guard against thinking that tomorrow will always be like today. The UK's vision of the future strategic context is not simply of existing threats set against a steadily more challenging physical, social and technological environment. The future is inherently uncertain. And the speed with which powerful trends are developing, the range of unpredictable ways in which they could interact, and the vulnerability of an increasingly interdependent international system to potential shocks serve to increase both complexity and uncertainty.

Of course, it need not be all bad news. There are opportunities as well as threats. The powerful forces of globalization, technological advancement and the rapid development of emerging economic powers should help drive sustained global growth, and thereby create new levels of relative wealth in the world. And amidst this, it is always possible that the lion will lie down with the lamb, and that everyone will beat their swords into ploughshares. But the UK should be prepared in case they don't.

Indeed, globalization and the rapid development of China, India and other states are already fundamentally altering the relative balance of power, both regionally and more widely. Their emergence has the potential to change significantly the international system in which the UK operates. The impact of these changes on existing international security structures could in some circumstances make it harder to build consensus on difficult issues. Existing international institutions and mechanisms do, though, provide the means through which to manage such change. So for the UK some developments provide valuable opportunities. But its increasing dependence on others within a globalized world also presents new vulnerabilities, and underlines the wide geographic range of our strategic interests.

The UK has long had to look well beyond its borders to secure its future. Its prosperity was built on trade, commerce and the rule of international law. But in an increasingly tightly-knit

global community, in which people, goods, services and information circle the planet as never before, the UK's success and security are ever more closely tied to that of the interconnected world.

So the UK's security is not a matter of borders. We cannot separate threats within the UK from those overseas – both are of strategic importance. Challenges to the global system are challenges to our own prosperity and security.

### ***The UK needs the agility to switch quickly from one part of the operational spectrum to another, often within the same part of the same campaign***

As a country with one of the world's five largest economies; as one of five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council; as a leading member of the EU and the world's most successful military alliance – NATO; in short, as a major player in the international system, the UK has both rights and responsibilities. It must act where its own interests are challenged – as it did, for example, in Afghanistan. But it must also discharge its responsibilities to defend the rights of others, where it thinks it can make a difference. In Pakistan after the earthquake, in sub-Saharan Africa, in the Caribbean and in the Lebanon, the UK has played its part as a force for good.

And the UK has very often done so through active and effective armed forces. The UK's military capabilities have enabled it to play a part in shaping and protecting the international system. By building security around the world, the UK creates a space within which its government can deliver its wider objectives.

But the Armed Forces alone cannot secure the UK's place in the international system. The challenges faced today – that will be faced in the future – are complex. And complex problems rarely



permit simplistic solutions. There are cases where, even though it may be greatly regretted, armed forces are of limited or no utility. And where they have an important role to play – as the UK believes they often do – it is usually as part of a wider and united effort.

This has been seen in the Balkans, in Iraq, and in Afghanistan. Very often the underlying issues have to do with governance and all that this implies: representational government at various levels; effective administrative structures; a functioning system of justice underpinning the rule of law; economic and social development; and numerous other factors. Whilst these are not military business, it is progress in these areas that is very often the key to strategic success in the wider sense.

### The Comprehensive Approach

So the situation has arisen where the military alone cannot deliver that success; but where equally it cannot be delivered without the military. Hence the need for what is called the *Comprehensive Approach*, that is, the co-ordinated and synergistic application of all lines of development: political, diplomatic, military, legal, economic, social, and so on. And that means the co-ordinated and synergistic effort of those who are responsible for the various activities. But the UK's goal is not to rebuild nations; it is to enable them to rebuild themselves.

The success of this approach can be seen in the Balkans. While the work of the international community is certainly not over, remarkable progress has been made over the last fifteen years. The UK Armed Forces played a decisive part in these efforts, enforcing peace and providing the security framework for others to take forward diplomatic and development agendas.

Bosnian forces, for example, are now taking control of their own security, and will soon be able to do so alone. This is because the other arms of government have played their part in building the basic functions of the Balkan states, which in turn has prepared them to take on wider responsibilities. This long-term, comprehensive engagement is not a quick

win; it requires both resources and time. But it works. The UK does not expect its more recent challenges to be over any quicker – both Iraq and Afghanistan will need a long-term investment by the international community, and the strategic patience to go with it.

Of course, the comprehensive approach need not, and indeed should not, only begin when the fighting starts. It is much better to prevent conflict than to have to resolve it. But even here the Armed Forces have an important role to play. Working in partnership with diplomats and development agencies they can help build capacity within states, both to maintain their own security and to contribute to regional peacekeeping forces.

But this is not to confuse the Comprehensive Approach with an exclusive focus on what many refer to as soft power. Even within that wider framework, the UK has had to deliver military effect across the full spectrum of operations. If it is to continue to contribute effectively to the international system on which we all depend and of which the UK is such a leading member, it needs armed forces that can achieve success in high-end war fighting as well as in capacity building and stabilization tasks. The UK needs to be in the premier league.

So what does this mean in practice? Well, in general terms it means the UK needs the agility to switch quickly from one part of the operational spectrum to another, often within the same part of the same campaign. It means the UK needs the adaptability to react successfully to an uncertain future; to cope with challenges that it did not or could not foresee. And these qualities of agility and adaptability are as important in its people as they are in its equipment and doctrine.

More specifically, the UK needs the strategic and tactical mobility to be able to deploy force rapidly, both to a theatre and within it. It needs the full spectrum of intelligence and surveillance capabilities to build a useful picture of ever more complex battlespaces. It needs the finest Special Forces, and the appropriate support, to deal with the range of unconventional and asymmetric

threats that it sees proliferating in today's world. The UK needs to be able to create precision effect very rapidly; effect that may sometimes be destructive, but will often be constructive. And it needs the right supporting structure to enable all this.

These capabilities come from top quality people – people who have the inherent traits of endurance, determination, courage and mental agility; people who have developed their capacity through extensive, demanding training; and people who are able to exploit the advantages of modern technology.

This comes at a huge cost for some. For them, it is the sacrifice of life and limb; the loss of loved ones; suffering and grief. This very high price is one that the men and women of the UK's Armed Forces, and their families, choose to face with high courage. They know the seriousness of the issues, and their example should both humble us and strengthen our resolve to support them both materially and in spirit.

The exact level of defence expenditure in the UK may be debated, but it should be done so in the right context. Given the risks faced in an uncertain future, an investment of somewhere between 2–3 per cent of UK GDP to guard against them seems a pretty good bargain. Devoting between 5–6 per cent of overall public expenditure on the State's first duty to its citizens is a modest enough proposition.

And just as important is the determination that citizens show – a determination to face the challenges of a difficult world and bear with resolution their part in addressing them. Equally, there must be strength of purpose and strategic patience to hold to long-term aims despite the short-term vagaries of fortune, and above all, a commitment to the young men and women of the UK's Armed Forces who undertake and risk so much on everyone's behalf. They are the flower of the UK nation, and they should be nurtured accordingly.

In the words of Thucydides: 'Prosperity can be only for the free; freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it.' ■



# Nelson Mandela International Essay Competition

## On African Security and Development

Entries are invited to address the following question  
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**"What should African armed forces of the 21st Century look like?"**

Some themes to address might include: The future threats African militaries are likely to face and the capabilities that will be needed to combat them; the changes that are required in terms of their current force structures; the efficacy of external assistance in this process; the main challenges to civil-military relations in Africa; the prospects for success of the proposed African Standby Force and African peacekeeping in general.

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- Authors of any nationality are eligible, but their work must be presented in English
- Essays must not be less than 3,000 words and not more than 3,500 words in length

Closing date for entries to the competition is 19 April 2007. Entries are preferred by e-mail but will be accepted on paper by post and fax. Please do not send floppy disks.

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Please supply your name, a one-paragraph biography and current affiliation, address and e-mail on the first page of the essay.

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