

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF'S KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE RUSI LAND WARFARE CONFERENCE 2011: FUTURE FORCE 2020

My job today is to develop detail from CGS's address yesterday and give you a feel for the way that we will run the Land Force over the next 4 to 5 years. I will talk about information management and exploitation at the very end of my talk, but I am not intending to talk about cyber or equipment. I am going to cover the reality of commanding the Land Force at a time of uncertainty and change.

There are two parallel activities going on at the moment. The first is winning the fight in Afghanistan in conjunction with all the other participants in the comprehensive approach, at the same time as transforming the Afghan national security forces. That, from a British perspective, is an extremely challenging task. But in parallel there is a requirement for us to transform so that we are in a position, by 2015, to meet the requirements of an uncertain world. I am working to an order that we will be out of combat operations in Afghanistan by the end of 2014, and as most of you here will know, 2015 is the fourth year in Planning Round 12; therefore it is my job to make sure that the Land Force is properly geared for the requirements of 2015 without taking our foot off the pedal that generates force into Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, I do not need to tell anybody here, has been a challenging, rewarding, and testing experience. I think if you read the papers at the moment you should be beginning to get a whiff that the persistent efforts to secure and train are beginning to have their effect. You can now drive from Lashkar Gah, through Nad-e Ali, up route Trident to Nahr-e Saraj and then back down the 601 into Lashkar Gah without significant support. I also heard that Governor Mangal was returning from Sangin the other day down the 611, he was attacked but it wasn't effective. This is an extraordinary change when this time last year I went to PB2 in Nahr-e Saraj and had to use a helicopter to get 2 miles down the road to PB4.

There has been an extraordinary change in the security in many parts of Southern Afghanistan where General Stan McCrystal undertook to undermine the insurgency. It is being done in close partnership with increasingly sophisticated Afghan national security forces. So the aspiration to transition to them, although very challenging, is on track from a military perspective.

I think our concern needs to be in other areas, and I am not making a military alibi, I am saying that at the moment the security situation in Afghanistan appears - from the perspective of the guy who is responsible for generating force into the British area - to be going well. Now there is a need for small 'p' politics, for Afghan civil society to start taking over, and create a security environment for ANSF that will be very different from the one that we have faced. But it is a challenging country, nothing that happens in Afghanistan is quite what you expect and we have to remain very much on our toes for the next 3-3½ years because things are unlikely to pan out in the way that we are planning. There is no reason for us to believe that we are unable to achieve the tasks that we are being set. I think it is just worth reflecting, and I will return to this at the end, on the extraordinary adaptability, commitment and perseverance of our people who have conducted their part in this campaign along with the other ISAF nations, particularly the United States who we have been working closely alongside. This has been an extraordinary achievement in my opinion.

The scene that was given to you yesterday was essentially a requirement to establish what we were going to be doing in 2020 and a move through to 2015 where the hard blue arrow of Afghanistan is converted into the softer green arrow which represents our enduring capability. [refer to slide 1]. What we have to do is to progress within the tolerance of the 2 blue boundary arrows that point towards 2020. I don't need certainty in the 2020 timeframe, I just need to have a tolerance that will allow us to get into that area.

But there are two significant challenges. The first of these, the arrows pressing into the green represents financial pressure, they dig into those parts of our programme that are not directly related to Afghanistan. My task is to make sure when we switch our effort from Afghanistan that it

is those 'green' activities, that are under pressure now, that are actually at the forefront of our capability. I had made an assumption, when I first drew this chart, that world events would start in about 2015, and then Libya kicked off. So the unpredictability of world events could knock us off line at any time and we do need to be prepared for that. But it is absolutely clear to me that if we move from an Afghan footing to our future posture in one movement, we will get it wrong. We need to start thinking about that transformation today. We need to think very carefully what the core elements of our capability are, both the elements which we need to transfer from our Afghan experience and those which we need to regenerate because we have not been practising them over the past few years.

I think that there are 4 key components to this. The first you will have heard a bit about yesterday, when combined arms manoeuvre was discussed; we need to understand the basic enduring tactical skills required in the Land component. I think I witnessed an extraordinary transformation last year when targeting, the activity that people associate with an air tasking order delivering input based effect onto an enemy, changed in front of our eyes. It was evident that real time requirements - very often triggered by a patrol commander on the ground - demanded soft and hard targeting effects. They were informed by an incredible number of different feeds that were fused at the lowest possible tactical level and allowed us to create a real time focussed effect, both physical and mental, upon the enemy. That is a massive transformation in the way that we do our business, and its basic. It is as basic as fire and manoeuvre, we need to understand what is happening and bring the change in to our culture. This is just one example of the 'basics' that we need to define now and then start to teach our people as a matter of routine. It is a concern to me that I have seen, I think, a reversion to old practise if you examine the Libya operation. It's a outside my area of responsibility, but if we are reverting to the old strategic targeting mantra, which in my view is too input focussed and does not recognise effect to the extent that anybody in the Land component should understand as second nature. So, we have got to understand and train our people in the basics, which will include the enduring principles of fire and manoeuvre but there are other things emerging from contemporary experience that we need to define now.

Secondly, and I am not some sort of muscle busting chap, but we have to be fit. You can't grow fitness overnight. Fitness is something which takes time to develop, and I am just not talking about the ability to do a personal fitness assessment. I am talking about an Army that is fit in mind and body and ready to take on the challenges that are thrown at it. I don't think we would have been able to do some of the things we have done in Afghanistan if we hadn't had really well tuned people, who were able to take on adversity by their physical and mental agility. Now don't underestimate the how challenging this is, it is not something that comes from making tests more difficult, its not something that comes by the Divisional commander standing on the bonnet of his staff car and telling his subordinates that he's just done his battlefield fitness assessment. This has to be deeply embedded as part of a culture of an efficient and an effective organisation.

And then the third component is commitment, this is probably one of the more challenging things that we face at the moment, because in any time of uncertainty people will tend to grasp on those things that worry them and the conversations are all about the things that trouble them. And yet what we need to do is to give a degree of certainty to the people that are absolutely fundamental to our business. Very briefly, as an aside, I have noticed over the past couple of years that there is a distinct difference in understanding of the characteristics of the Land component compared to the other environments. When we talk about priorities in the land environment, particularly regarding equipment it is not the priorities between platforms, since that risks missing the point. A land platform is a battlegroup. It is built up of a whole series of different bits and pieces, all of which play their part and are equally important. People are at the heart of land power, their bravery and commitment to take the fight to the objective is the fundamental aspect of what we do. And if we have people who are concerned, who are troubled, who don't believe in their chain of command, then we are not going to have the level of commitment that we need to bind together the Land platform: the battlegroup, the brigade, whatever it is. Uncertainty in itself doesn't bother me; every operational theatre I have ever been into has been uncertain. It is our job to bring sufficient certainty to the plan so that our people are focused and committed on the task in hand.

And the last point is adaptive command and control. It's interesting; I asked for a slide that showed adaptive command and control [refer to slide 2]. I did ask for it last night, but this seems to be the most modern slide for command and control that sits in the Land Forces library. I am making a very, very serious point. We do not understand the information environment that we are operating in. We do not understand how to exploit the social networks, the extraordinary levels of connectivity that exist out there. If we are going to achieve success in the future, our ability to invest in hugely adaptable command and control mechanisms, and officers who really understand how to exploit this, if we don't do that we will fail. And so the fourth key aspect that we need to generate is an adaptable, sophisticated command and control mechanism that can out manoeuvre our adversaries and can operate in an environment where networks are absolutely at the forefront of what we do.

Now, I have told you that there are 2 main things that we are dealing with: Afghanistan and preparing for the future. Afghanistan is broadly on track; there will be some surprises; but be supremely confident that we will deliver what is required. The real challenge is shifting ourselves from that campaign footing to a position in 2015 where I can deliver to the CGS the sort of basic capability that he can then build on to meet the requirements of the future. And that capability requires us to understand the basics, and there are many basics which have emerged that are new; to have committed people, who will do very dangerous things and they will do them well. We need people who are committed and who are not as concerned about uncertainty as some would encourage us to be; we need people that are fit in body and mind and are led and commanded by people who understand adaptive command and control in a contemporary setting. It will be very easy to achieve this if we set our minds to it.