

THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF'S KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE RUSI LAND WARFARE CONFERENCE 2011: FUTURE FORCE 2020

[As delivered]

This conference seeks to cover the range of topics and factors that we must all consider in shaping our Land Forces for the future, and I propose to kick this off by giving you a perspective of the challenge that we face over the next decade in the case of the British Army.

We are approaching in the British Army, a transformational opportunity that will allow us to shape Land Forces fit for the demands of the 2020's. But, in the decade ahead, we do have to surmount a number of hurdles and challenges. We have to: take the Afghan Campaign to a militarily successful conclusion. Succeed in coping with whatever the unexpected throws at us. Implement the design for Future Forces 2020 as laid out in the recent Defence Review but of course tempered by the financial realities of successive programming rounds into the future, which are demanding and will certainly involve some more difficult decisions both across Defence and within the Army. As part of that, handle fluctuations in resources as functions of economic uncertainty, and above all, recruit, educate, train and retain people with the right talent and military spirit.

Afghanistan remains the UK's main effort in Defence and it's the Army's overriding preoccupation. This could not be more important to us. The 2014 timeline that has been declared in the Lisbon Summit for transition of the combat role in Afghanistan to the Afghan security forces now gives us a very clear programming mark against which to work out what has to happen successfully between now and then. This will see us transitioning to an Afghan lead for security, and of course an Afghan lead for governance which is already evident in many parts of that country. The burgeoning Afghan sovereignty is welcome although it does occasionally present itself in interesting ways.

Partnering and mentoring are the emerging challenge and those are going to evolve over the next few years until such time as the Afghans themselves are fully in the lead. But key to terminating any insurgency is going to be the form of political resolution, something over which we as a nation, and certainly we as any Army, do not have direct control. This is very much an issue for Afghan people, Afghan politicians and those in the region. But let me assure you that our Army does have the stamina to sustain this effort, to evolve with the changing demands of the campaign and to adapt as necessary.

But of course that campaign is the one thing we do know about in the next 3 or 4 years. It's set against the back drop of how in an SDSR and National Security strategy context we have sought as a Nation to handle the inevitable unpredictability of other events. Of course, in a period of economic stringency there is a natural tendency to want to reduce uncertainty, and particularly so on the back of what some have seen as the awkward experiences of enduring campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Especially, when those two were overlapping with the inevitable constraints on resources, enablers and so on and so forth. And the Government wishes to exercise more discretion over the use of force. It wants to promote conflict prevention through the enhanced funding of international development, it wants to harness soft power as an influence tool and build relationships and it wants to share burdens within alliances and coalitions. We are of course also now forging a new set of strong bilateral relationships as witnessed by the recent treaty signed between France and the United Kingdom. But even then wars pick us, we don't pick them. Just look at the Arab Spring, look at the global impacts of things that we would rather were more localised. And the national response to these things, the promotion of our values, the aversion to humanitarian crisis, oppression and potential genocide means that to a greater or lesser extent we tend to get involved.

My general point here is not about whether we have the specific resources on a given day to do a Non-combatant Evacuation Operation or to enforce a no-fly zone. It's about unpredictability and the difficulty we face in our nation in standing back in the face of challenges to our values and

threats to the national and international interests which are exaggerated by globalization. Libya is but the latest reminder of the need for balanced capability at readiness.

We do over this decade in the Army have to transform ourselves from our current focus which is very much Afghan centric, and actually within Afghanistan quite localised to parts of the South, to something that gives us a more broad based military capability with a re-growth of contingency. Like a number of other Armies we have over this period been forced to put some aspects of our war fighting capability temporarily on hold as we get completely absorbed by the challenges of success in Afghanistan. Developing the sorts of sophistication that we have evolved in Iraq and Afghanistan, in the style of operations that we have prosecuted there, is very important to draw into our Future Force Design, applying the relevant lessons from those campaigns and investing accordingly to deliver capabilities that will match the hybrid challenges of the future.

Obviously Combined Arms Manoeuvre remains a part of our repertoire but it has to be modernised and coupled with our ability to handle asymmetric and irregular threats. It also has to take account of additional dimensions in battle space for example the cyber domain about which we shall be hearing more later. But I also think that we have got far too used to a post expeditionary psyche where we have hard-wired bandwidth, where we have quite sophisticated facilities in places like Camp Bastion. We need to transition our thinking to a more expeditionary psyche where in the early days of a new campaign we will be forced to operate without the sophistication that we've manage to grow into the Afghan landscape.

And then there is our challenge with equipment. The army has an excellent suite of equipment at the moment, but it is specific to the Afghan challenge. If we look at our core equipment programme, its rather a different story. This programme has tended to be a budget regulator for the whole of defence as witnessed by comments in the recent National Audit Office report on the procurement of armoured systems. This is something that we have to address aggressively and innovatively in the next year or two if we are to have an equipment programme we can be proud of into the 2020's.

What of the wider resource challenge? Well, the government has made it very clear that there is a strategic goal to restore economic balance within which Defence must play its part. A strong defence does after all, in due course, rely upon a strong economy. And so we face a budget that is reducing considerably over the early years of the coming decade, after which we will certainly require a real terms growth in the latter part of the decade if we are to resource Future Force 2020. Against that resource backdrop we will also be enacting significant changes to the way the Army lives. There will be, post the Afghan Campaign, a reversion to garrison soldiering and the re-growth of our contingency capabilities with a change of lifestyle from that which the bulk of our young people - anybody who has joined since 2002 for example - will be familiar. This is going to be novel for them. It's familiar to those of us who served in the 80's and 90's in the Cold War and the Bosnian period, but we need to grow a ready army that can yet again address the full spectrum of military skill-sets.

Over this period we're going to re-base large elements of that operational capability from Germany onto the UK Mainland and inevitably people's first focus in that situation is on infrastructure, but I put it to you that we need to think first about training. That will be key and we will need more capacity on the UK Mainland as well as some innovative training opportunities overseas. We will of course want to embrace a greater emphasis on simulation to cut down the costs of some of that training. We will also need to enhance things like whole fleet management; something that we have been pretty tentative about so far, making better use of contractors to enable us to produce affordable training and equipping solutions.

There is the Whole Force Concept, a train that has left the station, but without yet sufficient definition, but will see us in due course, trading regular manpower, in some areas with more emphasis on Reserves and on contractors. All of which is theoretical at the moment and we need to work hard to put some definition on that to make sure that it can be done with reasonable risk

and at lower cost. And there is a new employment model, aiming at a more stable living model for our officers and soldiers, whilst freeing up more resources for the front line.

The critical issue in all of this transition over the next 10 years is how we shape the offer to our people. They want challenging and rewarding careers in a professional well equipped highly trained organisation that is world class. They want to be in an organisation that is valued by society, relevant to the evolving needs of the nation and attuned to the changing character of conflict and one that is also relevant to our allies. That's a big challenge. If we can deliver that we will, I am sure, have the people that we need.

A word on talent. Key to our success at the moment, with all of the complexities that we face, is the ability of our young people to adapt, innovate and overcome. That is probably a demand that is going to be even greater in the future. So, we have to be able to attract these people; we have to be able to educate them better; we have to have sophisticated, appealing, satisfying training that's relevant. We have to sustain these peoples' inclination to volunteer and to keep volunteering.

So in sum, I think I've described a situation where there is plenty to be getting on with. I'm absolutely confident that we have the professional acumen to get there, subject to a reasonable share of an appropriate Defence Programme which will allow us to round off our contribution to Afghanistan with military success. We need to shape ourselves for a world that has recently been demonstrated, notwithstanding the way that others would wish it to be, to be fundamentally unpredictable. We need to grow a contingency capability that we can be proud of, to undertake all of the institutional transition that is so important and which we will be discussing over the next day or so. And finally, to attract and retain the sort of talent that we have become used to which defines the quality of the British Army alongside its peers around the world.