



CHATHAM HOUSE

Chatham House, 10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE  
T: +44 (0)20 7957 5700 E: [contact@chathamhouse.org.uk](mailto:contact@chathamhouse.org.uk)  
F: +44 (0)20 7957 5710 [www.chathamhouse.org.uk](http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk)  
Charity Registration Number: 208223

Transcript

# A Perspective on the Nature of Future Conflict

General Sir Richard Dannatt

Friday 15 May 2009

**Chatham House is independent and owes no allegiance to government or to any political body. It does not hold opinions of its own; the views expressed in this text are the responsibility of the speaker. This document is issued on the understanding that if any extract is used, the speaker and Chatham House should be credited, preferably with the date of the event.**

## **General Sir Richard Dannatt:**

May I begin by thanking you for your very warm and generous introduction, and say that it is, as always, a great honour to be invited to address this distinguished institution. I know I speak for my fellow Chiefs in expressing our appreciation for the immensely valuable contribution that Chatham House makes to stimulating debate and to policy-making in the Defence and Security arena. And my purpose here today is to contribute to that debate and, I hope, to foster an even wider discussion - not simply among policy-makers, commentators and academics, but above all to engage broader public interest - because Defence matters, and it particularly matters today. High among the concerns I have as CGS, is that although support for our Armed Forces by the British public is as high as I have ever known it to be, the degree of public understanding and awareness of the nature and extent of the threats we face, now and in the future, and the role of the Armed Forces in tackling those threats, is probably as low as I have known it to be - and that is not the fault of the general public.

Because, this is no time for a false sense of security. Writing in *The Times* recently, Niall Ferguson captured the essence of the challenge we face in the phrase, "an axis of upheaval" in which he suggested that: "economic volatility, plus ethnic disintegration, plus empires in decline are about the most lethal combination in geopolitics. We now have all three. The age of upheaval starts here." And, he is not alone in drawing a parallel with the 1930s. And although that may appear alarmist to some, complacency and ignorance would be worse still.

Moreover a public debate along the lines I am suggesting should also be welcomed by those charged with formulating policy and with taking some of the difficult decisions we are facing. And with politicians from all parties confronted by the need to reduce public spending, echoed in George Osborne's recent call for an "age of austerity", with the re-write of the National Security Strategy ongoing and with the near certain prospect of a Strategic Defence Review, this public debate can only be healthy, helpful and timely. Arguably we are approaching a strategic crossroads at which the decisions to be taken might include a fundamental revision of Britain's place in the world and our associated level of national ambition; and must include the shape, balance, role and size of our Armed Forces. Debating these issues must not be undertaken lightly, but nor should the debate be left exclusively to specialists; it requires public engagement and it requires a national dialogue.

So, at least part of my purpose here today is both to inform and to stimulate that debate. And I firmly believe that the starting point for this discussion must be an

assessment of the nature of future conflict - the threats we face now and those we are likely to face in the future as a nation - for without this understanding and consensus we cannot hope to ensure that the roles and capabilities of our Armed Forces remain relevant to the UK's needs. And if I have an underlying theme, it is that of relevance - and at present I can only conclude that much of our planned investment in Defence is at the very least of questionable relevance to the challenges we face now and will in the future. In setting out this assessment, I will endeavour to do so from a Defence perspective, rather than a parochial Army one: our experience on recent campaigns has underlined our joint interdependence on the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force and the vital enabling capabilities they provide.

So what of future conflict? Well, the perils of futures prediction are clear - strategic shocks happen: 9/11, The Falklands and Kuwait in 1990 are all examples of our inability to predict or foresee the future, even at close range. We would therefore do well to heed Professor Michael Howard's warning that "No matter how clearly one thinks, it is impossible to anticipate precisely the character of future conflict. The key is to not be so far off the mark that it becomes impossible to adjust once that character is revealed". But as I will argue, the character of future conflict is being revealed and that even conflicts arising from unforeseen events will share many of the same characteristics as the conflicts we are engaged in today. Moreover our US allies share the same view; General Jim Mattis, Commander of US Joint Forces Command recently told Congress: "Simply put, much of what we see in the cities of Iraq, the mountains of Afghanistan, and the foothills of southern Lebanon, I believe we will see again in the future."

But in setting out the nature of future conflict we cannot consider war or conflict in isolation. Conflict is above all a political activity and it must always be placed in its political context: Clausewitz tells us: "War cannot be divorced from political life; and whenever this occurs in our thinking about war, the many links that connect the two elements are destroyed and we are left with something pointless and devoid of sense." So my scope today is necessarily broader than a simple description of our potential adversaries and how they may choose to fight us. And so before I address the principal theme of this talk - the nature of future conflict - I feel I must try to address the strategic drivers that will dictate the 'how and why' of the future conflicts we may face. In doing so I will take stock of where we are, the threats and risks we are likely to face, and the national interests and policy goals that will affect how and why we may choose to employ force. This discussion of the strategic drivers will set the context for the three key issues I want to address subsequently:

First, what will be the utility of force as an instrument of national power?

Second, what is the nature of the future conflicts in which we will be engaged?

And third, perhaps drawing deductions from those first two questions, what broad implications does all this have for Defence?

### Strategic Drivers

So what are the strategic drivers for future conflict? Well, our start point must be to take account of where we are now - this is the inescapable context: the present is the area where we have the greatest clarity and the least discretion and, given the tyranny of the electoral cycle, also the dimension that will have the greatest impact on policy makers. And it will impact on public opinion regardless of longer term strategic perspective and cooler judgements. That said, I would suggest that there are 4 factors that will profoundly impact on future decision making:

First, the legacy of 'Blair's Wars' is a political generation who may have formed the view that military intervention is prohibitively costly - in terms of both political and financial capital and above all in the human cost. Let us not forget that 338 of our soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen have given their lives in the service of their country and almost 1000 have been wounded. Many will carry the disabilities and bear the physical and mental scars for the rest of their lives. And inevitably, these being land campaigns, the Army has borne the greatest burden. But despite this, I do not believe that the natural inclination of political leaders to act when confronted by a crisis will diminish. Doing the right thing will always be the right thing to do. So we should not assume that this 'age of uncertainty' will give us as much discretion as we might hope for. But what is clear is that it will fall to our political leaders to go to greater lengths than before to explain the imperative, legitimacy and rationale for the use of force - and also to set out a clear and compelling narrative to parliament and to the public. And it must fall to us at the top of Defence to educate, and to explain the utility of force as an instrument of national power. And above all it must fall to us to ensure that the military instrument does, indeed, have utility - and to do this we must constantly adapt to remain relevant.

Second, the economic downturn - perhaps the most severe for 70 years - will of course constrain our ability to fund the Defence capabilities that we need to sustain a truly 'balanced force' against all contingencies. But ironically the global economic crisis will also serve as a catalyst of global instability - increasing the threats and perhaps, by extension, the demands on our Armed Forces. So precisely at the point

we need to invest more in our defence and security, we may be forced to invest less - therefore we must invest wisely. In the words of US Secretary of Defense Bob Gates, we cannot 'do everything, buy everything' and to paraphrase a British government official speaking 100 years ago: 'we are running out of money - we're going to have to start to think!'

Third, our current Defence capabilities - and those we will field over the next decade - are largely a legacy of decisions taken 20 years ago rather than a true reflection of what we need today. Yes, much has been done to invest in the capabilities needed to fight and succeed in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Defence has been adapting, often rapidly and radically. But few of these investments have come from the core Defence budget where our balance of investment remains heavily skewed towards equipment and capabilities that are optimised for what Rupert Smith describes as 'Industrial Warfare'. These capabilities look increasingly tangential - some even irrelevant - given the challenges and threats we face today and in the future. My point is not to argue against the principle of a balanced force, it is simply to recognize that there is a key time aspect to this balance equation.

And fourth, we must recognise that delivering success in Afghanistan is not discretionary and is a 'now' issue. John Hutton has made clear Afghanistan's link to our national security and indeed the challenge we face: Whereas "The First and Second World Wars were the defining conflicts of the last century. It may be that Afghanistan will be the defining conflict of this century. It does strike to the heart of our interests as a nation. And the preservation of the values that all of us today hold most dear." But success will not come quickly - we should expect to be there for years to come - and it will not come easily - it will take a significant effort. But succeed we must: our own national security, our credibility and reputation, our strategic partnership with the US, and the future of NATO are all bound up in Afghanistan. We must ensure we do enough to succeed and not simply enough to fail.

### **Threat, Risk and Drivers of Instability**

But, turning now to the threats we are likely to face in the future - in common with a wide variety of publications and strategic assessments the National Security Strategy identifies a number of threats, risks and drivers of instability. I will not recite them all, but I highlight three points of consensus that I believe are key to determining the Defence capabilities we are most likely to require.

The first point of consensus, as the National Security Strategy sets out, is that, "for the foreseeable future, no state or alliance will have both the intent and the capability to threaten the United Kingdom militarily, either with nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction, or with conventional forces". Self-evidently this statement has profound implications for Armed Forces that are still largely equipped, trained and structured for a particular view of conventional state on state warfighting - and particularly so, when the threat spectrum is both more complex and demanding. It is difficult not to conclude that our focus on preparing and equipping for a particular type of conventional state threat has left us unbalanced. Our enemies have adapted. So must we.

Now I do not advocate that we fundamentally weaken our capabilities and expertise against a resurgent conventional existential threat, no matter how remote. So, yes, I do believe we need to maintain a balanced pool of capabilities as insurance against the future, but we also need to get the right balance between the near term, where there is much more certainty, and the long term. And in this regard, I see our present balance of investment as being too heavily weighted towards the future - this is the part of the equation that, in my view, we have mis-appreciated in recent years, and there is growing realization of this point.

The second key point of consensus concerns the threat to the UK from failed or failing states in an era of global interdependence. Key drivers of instability such as climate change, poverty, population growth, the global economic downturn and energy competition combine to undermine weak states, leading to regional conflict and instability. Depending on what measure you use there are between 40 and 70 potentially failing states globally and they threaten the very fabric that holds the international community together. Consequently we now recognise failed and failing states as the principal threat to our national interest. And the Prime Minister puts both the challenge and our response succinctly: "Once we feared rival nations becoming too strong; now the worst threats come from states that are too weak. Failing states...are a problem for us all. We must respond not by walking away...but by engaging as hard-headed internationalists - through diplomatic, economic and yes, when necessary, military action".

The deduction I draw from this has significant implications for Defence. If we are to be relevant, continuing to benchmark our forces predominantly against conventionally equipped hypothetical 'near-peer' enemies is now of limited utility. For the foreseeable future, the principal and most common threats to Britain's national interests will arise from instability and non-state groups. Of course our response to this will draw on all the levers of national power and rightly the use of force will generally be a last resort.

Unfortunately the 'soft levers' of diplomatic and economic power often have limited effectiveness as the examples of North Korea, Zimbabwe, Iraq, and Burma, to name but a few, show. On the other hand Sierra Leone is just one striking example of where timely military intervention can have a decisive and lasting effect, for the benefit of the UK, the country and the region. And so military force will often be required, and when it is, its purpose will be to prevent or pre-empt instability or to restore stability. Stabilisation operations will therefore be our most likely and most demanding task. And because stability is a human condition, the object of our operations will primarily be the local population rather than purely the opposing armed forces.

The third and final point of consensus to highlight is the proliferation of non-state groups. States no longer have a monopoly on strategically significant violence, as the Israeli Defence Forces found out in Lebanon in 2006, and the example of the global franchise established by Al Qaeda has led to a sharp increase in the incidence of trans-national violence being perpetrated by a bewildering array of terrorist groups, state proxies and militias for varying ends. These predatory non-state actors thrive and proliferate in conditions where there is a disintegration of state authority, spreading insurgency and disorder: either commercial insurgency (such as drug trafficking or trans-national organised crime), or most potently a spiritual insurgency as some commentators have described it. And it is this latter category that poses the greatest threat to our own security and way of life. The threat posed by Al Qaeda-inspired Islamist extremism operating from within failed and failing states is pervasive, global and deadly. So this is probably the struggle of our generation - perhaps our '30 years war' - but it is not one we wish to fight on our own soil, hence John Hutton's recent affirmation of Adam Ingram's recommendation: "that the defence contribution in countering terrorism should continue to be focussed primarily against the overseas terrorist threat, in order to keep the threat 'at arms length'. Nor is it a struggle that we would wish to fight with the tools of conventional interstate warfare and in this respect John Hutton was spot on when he called for "A rebalancing of investment in technology, equipment and people to meet the challenge of irregular warfare. If a country like the US, with all its vast resources and military strength has decided to prioritise, I think the UK should do the same."

### **Britain in the World - Policy Drivers and Strategic Culture**

So, if we have identified the struggle of our generation, how we respond to these complex threats is the central question to address.

Now there are of course those who would wish to walk away from today's reality and

make the case for a less ambitious, lower profile role, akin to many of our European partners, or even take an isolationist stance. This view, arising in part from the political costs of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, and from the financial pressures of the global financial crisis, cannot be ignored - for some, it is a legitimate reflection of contemporary domestic political concerns. But I, for one, do not agree.

And this perspective is flawed on at least two counts. It does not adequately recognise the globalisation of our national security interests - Trotsky's warning that "You may not be interested in this war, but this war is interested in you" is as relevant to today's threats as it was in 1917. And it would represent a radical departure from our inherent British 'strategic culture'. Our history and the inescapable demographic legacy of our Empire, our status, trading interests, geography, trans-Atlantic ties and responsibilities as a P5, G8, NATO and Commonwealth member make international activism hardwired into our political and national DNA: A year ago Gordon Brown said this: "Britain has always produced a strongly activist foreign policy...Britain is an island nation whose role in the world has, for centuries, been global. We recognise that what happens beyond our borders can have a dramatic impact on our citizens and national interests".

Moreover a non-interventionist stance is not consistent with current policy or the declared policy of any major political party. Any significant reduction in our defence posture would significantly diminish the influence our Armed Forces allow us to exert in Europe, NATO and above all with our principal ally, the United States.

And let's be clear about the United States. Closely linked to Britain's activist Foreign Policy, and pivotal to our Defence and Security, is the trans-Atlantic link. Professor Colin Gray puts it colourfully: "Drunk or sober, the US is a huge net positive security provider for Britain. The US alliance / connection - in all dimensions - is by far the best deal the UK can hope for...The US alliance is mandatory, it is not discretionary."

Britain's calculation has long been that maintaining military strategic 'partner of choice' status with the United States offers a degree of influence and security that has been pivotal to our Foreign and Defence Policy. But this relationship can only be sustained if it is founded on a certain 'military credibility threshold', as Professor Michael Clarke puts it. So, if we wish to preserve this relationship and status, then determining the capabilities we need to sustain this military credibility threshold with the United States is as least as important as those that flow from our own nationally defined Military Tasks. But credibility is more than a function of capabilities. Credibility with the US, as David Kilcullen pointed out only the other day, is earned by being an ally that can be relied on to state clearly what it will do and then does it effectively. And, credibility is

also linked to the vital currency of reputation. And in this respect there is recognition that our national and military reputation and credibility, unfairly or not, have been called into question at several levels in the eyes of our most important ally as a result of some aspects of the Iraq campaign. Taking steps to restore this credibility will be pivotal - and Afghanistan provides an opportunity - key to doing so will be an honest self-appraisal of our strategic, operational and tactical performance in Iraq. I have already instigated such a review within the Army so that we learn the appropriate tactical lessons to deliver success in Afghanistan. I would be encouraged to see a similar process undertaken at the operational and strategic level.

So, to draw a line under the first part of my remarks, these then are the strategic drivers that will influence how and why we may be faced with conflict in the future and provide our context. So let me return now to those 3 key questions that I flagged up at the beginning.

### **The Utility of Force**

So, to address the first question: what will be the utility of force as a national instrument of power? And somewhat quixotically my next comments actually serve to underline the limits of force as a discrete instrument.

Clausewitz's most enduring and valuable contribution was to remind us that 'war is an extension of politics by other means'. It follows therefore that conflict resolution can only ultimately be achieved by politics - not by force alone. This is all the more the case in the highly complex stabilisation campaigns we will continue to remain engaged in. And though much of the burden in these campaigns will fall on those in uniform, success can only be achieved if our actions are fully integrated with our government partners in the FCO, DFID and all the other instruments of national power - within an overall Comprehensive Approach. But many believe that approach has yet to be properly embraced across Whitehall and until we get better at integrating all our efforts we will continue to fall short. My point therefore is that without much better integration with all the instruments of national power, force alone may have very limited utility in today's conflicts, and may even prove counter-productive.

But having been a little equivocal about the utility of force so far, I believe that prevention is a role that has powerful relevance and utility today. It is a given that prevention is preferable to intervention. And, until now prevention, in MOD policy jargon, has usually been interpreted to involve the deterrent potential of credible and capable Armed Forces through so-called Power Projection'. In some cases, of course,

this type of operation is valid and can have great utility. But I believe that this narrow view does not fully address the intention behind the type of conflict prevention the National Security Strategy has in mind - that of building the capacity of indigenous governments, security forces and their regional partners to provide the conditions of security and stability to allow good governance, essential services and the rule of law to be delivered. This 'Strategic Partnering' can achieve exponential effects if implemented in a timely fashion. It can prevent crises and conflict from arising (saving money and lives), restore stability, and strengthen the United Kingdom's influence significantly in regions critical to our national interest. And on enduring stabilisation operations, partnering changes the strategic geometry, provides an 'exit strategy' and increases the essential element of presence and footprint by exploiting local forces. Military capacity building and Security Sector Reform are fundamentally a human and therefore land-based activity, relying on cross government cooperation and integration. The capabilities associated with this role should therefore become a key force driver.

But on the harder side of the equation, military intervention will continue to have enduring utility. When global security and Britain's national interests are threatened, and where conflict prevention has failed, military intervention to restore stability will remain an essential, and sometimes the only, policy option available to the Government. We should not assume that the experience of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan makes intervention less likely: Secretary of Defence Gates makes it clear that: "We are unlikely to repeat another Iraq or Afghanistan anytime soon - that is forced regime change followed by nation building under fire. But that doesn't mean we may not face similar challenges in a variety of locales". And in which case we must respond to them. And so the weight of likelihood is that intervention and stabilisation operations will be the pattern for the future, and with increasing frequency. So, we must structure and prepare accordingly.

But intervention will rarely be an end in itself - as I have said the purpose of any military intervention is likely to be the restoration of stability. As General Charles Krulak warned us 10 years ago: "instead of the beloved son of Desert Storm, Western Militaries are confronted with the unwanted step-child of Chechnya". All our previous assumptions about what is decisive in these operations have been overturned. In these most likely scenarios, the intervention can only be an enabling activity. It is the stabilisation operation that is decisive. It is an inconvenient truth that interventions, on whatever scale, may be periodic, but that enduring stabilisation operations on land, often involving intense combat, but focused on securing the population rather than exclusively on defeating the enemy will be the most likely experience that the bulk of our Armed Forces face for the foreseeable future. And the adoption of what we have

called Military Assistance to Stability and Development (MASD) as a new Military Task recognises this fact. If Defence is to remain relevant to these types of operation and to the needs of the Government, we must ensure that we now resource this new task, prioritising our investment in the capabilities, equipment, skills and training needed to optimise our Armed Forces for the demands of these operations.

So in an age of upheaval when threats may restrict the degree of discretion we would prefer, I believe the military instrument will continue to offer great utility, particularly when integrated effectively with all instruments of national power in a Comprehensive Approach. And, the key roles I judge we are likely to perform - prevention, intervention and stabilisation - will require campaign quality Armed Forces with expeditionary capabilities optimised, but not specialised, for these roles and for the nature of the conflict they will face. This brings me to the parallel question: what is the nature of the conflicts we are likely to face?

### **The Nature of Future Conflict**

Futures prediction is a perilous business and strategic shocks do happen. But in contrast to the position Defence Policy Makers found themselves in during the SDR of 1997- 98, where the uncertainty and lack of clarity forced us to adopt a capability-based approach to Defence, I would argue that we are now witnessing some clear signals to the nature of future conflict. Iraq and Afghanistan are not aberrations - they are signposts for the future. And I am not alone in this view - there is far more convergence in the academic community than the divergence represented by Huntington and Fukuyama in the 90's, and our closest allies have been drawing many of the same conclusions that I will set out here. This is no sterile academic debate. It affects the here and now - our soldiers, marines, sailors and airmen are experiencing these realities on a daily basis. And above all it gives us an opportunity to tailor our Defence capabilities to make them relevant - allowing us perhaps more usefully to adopt a more threat-led, or circumstance-led approach to Defence planning. In any event in this age of austerity I do not think we are going to be able to afford all the top quality clubs that we have hitherto aspired to put in our golf-bag.

And, some of the language used in the debate about future conflict has been radical. Rupert Smith has described it as a 'paradigm-shift'. Others have suggested another Revolution in Military Affairs. I have some sympathy with the spirit if not the substance of this approach, for as Basil Liddell-Hart observed rather acerbically, "The only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is to get an old one out". And I think we in Defence have been guilty of clinging steadfastly to an old idea,

the Cold War paradigm of interstate industrial war - Krulak's 'beloved son of Desert Storm' - for too long, and guilty of assuming that the capabilities required for this type of war would be fit for all. The force we have now, with its emphasis on high end technology and platforms optimised for defeating conventional opponents, is a reflection of that. In that respect, we are dominant, but we risk becoming increasingly irrelevant if we do not adapt, right across the board.

So I do not espouse the notion of a revolution or a paradigm shift in the nature of conflict. Because conflict is adversarial and interactive it constantly evolves. What we see today is the inevitable reaction of our adversaries, and potential adversaries - state or non-state to the overwhelming conventional superiority of the US and her allies. We should not assume that all our enemies will be as eccentric or compliant as Saddam Hussein.

How then should we set out to describe the challenges we will face? In the past our tidy military minds have inclined us to categorise conflict and warfare into discrete, tidy boxes: peace-keeping, peace-enforcement, counter-insurgency, irregular warfare and warfighting all neatly arranged in a linear fashion along a spectrum of conflict. What we face today, and will I believe face for the foreseeable future will be much more akin to a kaleidoscope of conflict. The only thing we can be sure of, as Colin Gray tells us is that: "We can predict with confidence that there is going to be a blurring, a further blurring, of warfare categories." The most apt term, and this is debatable, I have heard to describe this condition is 'hybrid', which the OED tells us means 'a thing combining two or more different elements or species'. Frank Hoffman described it like this: "Instead of separate challengers with fundamentally different approaches (conventional, irregular or terrorist) we can expect to face competitors who will employ all forms of war and tactics, perhaps simultaneously... conflicts will increasingly be characterised by a hybrid blend of traditional and irregular tactics, decentralised planning and execution and non-state actors, using both simple and sophisticated technologies in innovative ways."

Now I am not yet persuaded that it will be helpful to apply the label 'hybrid conflict' to describe the nature of future conflict; we should treat attempts to categorise this evolving type of warfare with caution for it can serve to condition and constrain our response. We do not need another catchphrase for the intellectually idle, but I do believe that it is helpful and accurate to describe the challenges we face in terms of hybrid circumstances and hybrid adversaries. Let me deal with each of these in turn.

I believe the term Hybrid Circumstances captures the complexity of the environment in which conflict will occur, and there are two trends worth highlighting.

The first significant trend is that we are in an era of persistent conflict. This implies persistent engagement, though not necessarily perpetual warfare. This arises from the multifaceted threats and causes of instability we face, above all from the threat of Al Qaeda-inspired Islamist Extremism - perhaps as I have suggested the struggle of our generation. This is not to say that individual conflicts might go on forever. But what is clear is that both the frequency and duration of conflict have increased to the extent that there is unlikely to be a discernible gap between conflicts. For our Armed Forces this implies persistent engagement, rather than the episodic, brief operations for which we are structured: go first, go fast, go home has had a very short shelf life as a policy. The implications are clear - we need forces capable of sustained campaigning, rather than one shot use, and we need to place and sustain Defence on a campaign, not a peacetime, footing.

The second trend is complexity and above all the complexity of the terrain, by which I mean physical, human and informational terrain. Our enemies will seek out physical terrain - ground by another name - that neutralises our standoff surveillance and targeting capabilities. We will find that operating in littoral regions, swamps and estuaries, jungles and mountains and above all in urban areas will become the norm. The human terrain will be highly complex as numerous population groups will coexist and compete. As the population will be the object of our operations, we will require sophisticated cultural and linguistic understanding - a skill second nature to our grandfathers and great uncles. And the complexity of the information environment can only increase. In operations where we compete for influence of the people, we must invert our current understanding and view these operations first and foremost as information campaigns and supported by wider military operations, rather than the other way round. And this complexity will be exacerbated by the likely expansion of conflict and competition into space and cyber-space.

So, adding to the complexity of these hybrid circumstances will be the challenge posed by hybrid adversaries: a combination of state, non-state and proxy forces. There is nothing new about irregular forces. But globalisation and the fragmentation of state authority in unstable regions has meant that the reach and impact these non-state groups can have is now global and not limited to a single country or region. Moreover, the diversity and proliferation of these groups is a new phenomenon - consider the array of insurgents operating in Iraq. Increasingly we are seeing the rise of truly capable non-state forces, exploiting ready access to technology and weapons often through state sponsorship. This is epitomised by forces such as Hezbollah, the Taliban and, in terms of global reach and lethality - Al Qaeda. These non-state groups and proxy forces are not the only threat: we know

that several potentially hostile states such as Iran have developed and practised extensively with asymmetric tactics and cooperating with irregular forces.

And what of the strategy these hybrid adversaries are likely to employ? What of their Ends, Ways and Means? In my view their ends are far less likely to be about defeat of adversaries' armed forces or territorial expansion and much more about control or influence of the local population - either for ideological or commercial reasons - at the expense of the legitimate state authorities. Thus future conflict will fundamentally involve a competition for people - for their loyalty, support and security. So I would extend Rupert Smith's pithy and much quoted phrase - we are engaged not just in war among the people but fundamentally in war about the people. People are no longer just the environment, they are the object. But what is inescapable is that competing for the will of the people and establishing security can only be achieved by operating among and alongside the people. It will take time and it will be manpower intensive. Of course technology will enable, but it cannot replace manpower and the human dimension. So, if the object of our operations is the people we should be pretty sceptical about concepts that suggest that war around the people can deliver our objectives. Such a notion misses the target both literally and figuratively. So, to bang this one out of sight, war among the people is the context, and war about the people is the object - and of course I use the term 'war' advisedly.

The means our hybrid adversaries will have access to cover the spectrum of capabilities - this is inevitable given that the envelope of hybrid adversaries contains both legitimate Armed Forces of potentially hostile states and non-state groups. But what is a new and threatening trend is the increased lethality and capability of non-state groups and the greater agility they show in exploiting emerging technology. Whether it is Hezbollah's use of anti-ship missiles, SIGINT, UAVs, and anti armour missiles, or the pervasive and ubiquitous threat of IEDs - sophisticated and simple - or the potential exploitation and use of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, we must assume that this trend will continue. Non-state groups will be our most likely opponents and their access to technology and to state-sponsorship will make them increasingly capable. We can have similar agility as the excellent and proven UOR process has shown, but if we are to remain ahead of our adversaries we must institutionalise this agility into routine acquisition. This is not just about bringing equipment that we have acquired via the UOR process into our core programme; it is a fundamental re-shaping of that core programme.

Finally we can expect the ways employed by hybrid adversaries to test our agility and adaptability. Hybrid tactics, irregular warfare, asymmetric approaches - call it what you will - are not new. Avoiding an opponent's strengths and exploiting his

weaknesses are the acme of fighting - think back to David and Goliath. And if the tactics employed by our adversaries today and in the future seem new, it is perhaps because we in the West have been slower to adapt than our enemies. In Kosovo the Serbian Forces learned from the costly experience of the Iraqi Army in 1991 and neutered NATO's overwhelming air superiority by dispersion, deception and camouflage largely avoiding destruction. And in 2006 Hezbollah, a decentralised mix of irregular forces employing a mix of regular state-like capabilities and irregular swarming insurgent tactics, were able to inflict a strategic defeat on the Israeli Defence Forces. These conflicts and the tactics they reveal are signposts for the future. And the sophistication and complexity of tactics employed by these hybrid adversaries is striking - in Iraq and Afghanistan we are seeing true 'all-arms' manoeuvre by our enemies, in complex ambushes for example. Moreover, these hybrid adversaries have also become highly adept at using and integrating all the levers of power available to them - ironically some are much more effective at the comprehensive approach than we - and Hezbollah's strategy of integrating employment, medical care and social welfare with military action and their sophisticated use of information operations, exploiting the media environment is a case in point. So, we should expect that future conflict will not be confined to a single theatre of operations, but may be waged at home as well through diasporas. 7/7 in 2005 is a stark example. And we should expect to be confronted by multifaceted threats: terrorism, piracy, insurgency and major combat with a hostile state's armed forces - all simultaneously. We must expect that our opponents will attempt to neutralise our superior stand-off surveillance and targeting capability by dispersing among the people and by operating in complex - most likely urban - terrain. And we should expect our dependence on space-based systems and cyber-space to be attacked and exploited. There is no panacea, or single solution to these hybrid threats. But we can and must do better to restore our balance.

### **The Implications for Defence**

So in the words of Lenin's famous revolutionary pamphlet: what is to be done? With one eye on the clock, let me try to draw these strands together by offering some broad conclusions on the implications, as I see them, for Defence.

My first point is one of positive encouragement. The imbalance that currently exists in Defence is an inevitable legacy of decisions taken, often decades ago. But it is not the case that the Army, or Defence more widely has not been adapting to the challenges we have faced since 2003. The Army has undergone a radical transformation in contact during this period - we are almost unrecognisable from the Army that formed

up in Kuwait in 2003: better equipped, better structured, better trained, better balanced, better led in the field and with a generation of hard-won experience. And as I set out at RUSI last year, we are adapting our force structure. While retaining the capability at extended readiness to conduct Divisional manoeuvre in Major Combat Operations as part of NATO or a US led coalition, we are taking far reaching measures to optimise the Army for the most likely enduring stabilisation tasks - with sufficient capacity to endure to success at the end of the campaign. As my opposite number in the United States, General George Casey said last year, this is what our principal ally wants from us. This process of transformation in contact is broad and deep, but perhaps most pertinently has included adapting major units to develop an institutionalised capability to conduct conflict prevention and stabilisation tasks. And of course elements of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force have adapted too. Iraq and Afghanistan have been entirely joint endeavours.

But this process of adaptation cannot address the deeper structural imbalance that characterises our Defence Capabilities. Balance is a loaded and often unhelpful term in Defence. Balance of what? Of spending? Of capabilities? Of cuts? But despite this nobody would disagree with the notion of a balanced force - who would argue for imbalance? The trick surely is to identify the right balance - and that varies over time, related to threats. The further out you look, the less clear the future is and therefore the more you need a balanced force to hedge against future uncertainty. But in the near to medium term, the nature of the problems we are confronted with are much clearer and so are the tools we need to deal with them - so in the near to medium term the Balanced Force should be replaced by the Relevant Force. So the judgement Defence has to make is the balance of investment between relevant capabilities designed to face the known challenges of the near to medium term and the spread-bet capabilities as a hedge against the uncertainties of the longer term. I believe the Government and the Opposition have begun to get this. As Liam Fox recently said: "Of course the main challenge here is between equipping our forces to succeed in our current conflicts without failing to prepare for any unknown future contingencies for our Armed Forces." Indeed the Government's National Security Strategy has already indicated that the balance should be shifted towards relevance: "we are determined to shift the overall balance of defence procurement towards support of current operations, while at the same time continuing to invest in a broad range of capabilities for the long term".

I am very encouraged by our Secretary of State's recent commitment to tackling this imbalance, for at present I can only take the view that Defence is over-investing in the far future at the expense of relevance for the threats we face today and in the medium term. Let me add fact to opinion: in the period of 2003 to 2018 - during which

timeframe we will have been engaged in two medium-scale stabilisation campaigns on land - only 10% of the MOD's equipment programme will have been invested in the land environment... But lest you think this is a parochial resource grab, I am also arguing strongly for relevant capabilities in the maritime and air environment - capabilities that are relevant to and optimised for the demands of operations today and in the near to medium term: support helicopters, surveillance platforms, and strategic lift to name but a few. Nor would I wish to convey the impression that for the Army there is a binary choice between relevance and balance or that the present and the future present different requirements. Equipping the Army correctly for the conflicts of today will provide it with the capability it needs to engage hybrid adversaries of the future. We urgently need a modern medium weight capability for today and tomorrow - now that would be a really sound and relevant investment.

## Conclusion

As you know, I will hand over as CGS to Gen Sir David Richards at the end of the summer. But before I finish, and with both eyes on the clock I would like to pay a particular tribute to the courage, skill and tenacity of all our soldiers who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan during my tenure. And in particular my pride in the job done in Iraq. The campaign was not easy. There were ups and downs and bumps along the way, mistakes have been made and we will learn from them. But the relative peace and stability we see today in Basra would not have happened without the sacrifice and professionalism of 100,000 or so soldiers, marines, sailors and airmen over 6 years. In the end Basra was wrested from the grip of the Iranian-backed militias as it should have been: significantly as a result of Iraqi leadership, with Iraqi forces, trained in part by us, and with coalition support. It could not and should not have occurred in any other way. And the enduring stability we see there is being delivered by Iraqi forces that we trained and helped equip. I take pride in that and I hope the families of all those who fell will take comfort in that legacy.

As far as Afghanistan is concerned I have already indicated that, as an Army, we are committed and prepared for a long term deployment - until the job is done. Our investment is already marked out in the 159 lives that we have lost to date, and, as an Army, we firmly believe that the operation is very much in the National interest, let alone that of Afghanistan, the Region or the world at large. Like Iraq, we have learnt, and are learning, lessons that are causing us to genuinely transform in contact - a process that is appropriate and right to the circumstances we face. But at the end of the day, this is all about people. Yes, in Afghanistan we are living, operating and fighting when necessary, among the people - but more importantly we recognise that

people are more than just the environment, they are the object of our endeavours, so what we are doing is about the people and for the people of Afghanistan, of the Region and of the international community more widely. And our operations are being conducted by our own British Service people. These are our citizens - these are our people, and they deserve to be valued, respected, supported and equipped by a Nation who appreciates what they are doing on behalf of us all. It is indeed a fine and honourable thing to be a British Soldier - and unlike Kipling's "Tommy this and Tommy that" we must not take the commitment of today's "Tommies" for granted. They have been transformed by today's contacts, they are prepared and willing to face tomorrow's challenges but we have an absolute obligation to understand their needs and to provide them with the tools and training to do their jobs, and not squander our increasingly scarce resources on those things that are not relevant to today's and tomorrow's absolute requirements. History will not judge our decision-making kindly if we duck the difficult decision and just muddle through. We are at the cross-roads.