



CHATHAM HOUSE

Chatham House, 10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE

T: +44 (0)20 7957 5700 E: contact@chathamhouse.org

F: +44 (0)20 7957 5710 www.chathamhouse.org

Charity Registration Number: 208223

Transcript

Defence Engagement: The British Army's Role in Building Security and Stability Overseas

General Sir Peter Wall GCB CBE ADC

Chief of the General Staff, British Army

Chair: Allan Mallinson

Defence Commentator and Author, *The Making of the British Army*

12 March 2014

The views expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of Chatham House, its staff, associates or Council. Chatham House is independent and owes no allegiance to any government or to any political body. It does not take institutional positions on policy issues. This document is issued on the understanding that if any extract is used, the author(s)/ speaker(s) and Chatham House should be credited, preferably with the date of the publication or details of the event. Where this document refers to or reports statements made by speakers at an event every effort has been made to provide a fair representation of their views and opinions, but the ultimate responsibility for accuracy lies with this document's author(s). The published text of speeches and presentations may differ from delivery.

General Sir Peter Wall:

The primary topic today is about so-called defence engagement - that's what it's called in the National Security Strategy, slightly strange words that don't necessarily engender an immediate understanding of what it is about - so I'm delighted to talk about it. But I'll talk a little bit first about the broader context in which we think the army is going to be operating as it comes out of 10 to 12 years of campaigning in Iraq and Afghanistan and looks to a future that certainly looks to have the potential to be reasonably uncertain.

By my reckoning, the world harbours plenty of threats that merit our attention. And it's in all of our interests to contribute to the security debate. And none less so than in the run-up to a putative defence review in the 2015-2016 timeframe.

On the back of the one that occurred in 2010, followed up by a sort of hasty three month exercise, which was quite an interesting challenge to our resources in 2011, and is essentially the baseline against which the army has been redesigned - whether I am a quantity surveyor, an architect, or whatever else you mentioned - we are seeking obviously as the army to make an active and physical contribution to doing what we can to providing security and stability at home and overseas in the national interest. But I think we're appropriate also in the broader regional and global interests should the United Kingdom see itself operating in that space in the future, which of course is where it's been through our lifetimes.

I've been asked to talk about the army's contribution to defence engagement and this will form the bulk of my remarks, but first I would like to put the work in the context of the world and wider security environment as I see it today. And I will talk a little bit about the transformation of the British Army under the Army 2020 programme to meet the challenges posed by this environment.

In terms of the international context, shifts in the global balance of power from Europe and the Atlantic to Asia and the Pacific are certainly challenging our previous assumptions and they are forcing a reorientation of economic and defence priorities. In parallel, I think we have to recognise that we no longer enjoy guaranteed advantage from technological superiority. And if we go down to a lower level, within many nations there is a perception of inequality between apparent haves and have-nots and who, with many associated grievances, set the conditions for increased instability and societal tension.

As the US sees the Pacific region growing in priority there will be a greater reliance in Europe for us to fend for ourselves. And you will recall the

challenges that Mr [Robert] Gates laid down in that regard in 2011 about our ability to gear ourselves up to properly resource our effort rather than discounting what we might do in light of what the Americans have been doing up to that point.

So you could take the view that our backyard - that area for which we are responsible for security ourselves rather than relying on others in broader coalitions - is getting bigger. And we have seen from recent events that instabilities in North Africa, the Maghreb, and the Middle East can quickly spill over into Europe and so we have a clear interest in containing the fall-out from those sorts of conflicts. Much of this instability has been caused by, and is certainly being exploited by, predominantly Islamic fundamentalist terrorism networks and they are now well established on an arc from the Arabian Peninsula through the Horn of Africa and across the Sahel. And they too explore linkages to money and people flows which stem from a more criminal motivation. Whilst Al-Qaeda appears a shadow of its former self - certainly to some people's interpretation - its franchises are flourishing, as witnessed recently in Mali, Nigeria, Kenya and, perhaps most worryingly, in Syria to the point where the most violent fundamentalist organisations, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, have recently been disenfranchised by Al-Qaeda.

We can add to this emerging mix of threats to the UK and UK interests, things like: cyber, cyber attacks, offensive use of cyber against our networks both public and commercial; the potential for our adversaries to acquire ballistic missile capability; the prospect of CBRN (Chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) on the loose or in the wrong hands; and then terrorist motivations and instabilities resulting from the failing states that are a part of this mix.

And we should not rule out the potential for force-on-force engagements which are felt by many to be less than likely and a thing of the past, but we do know that military manoeuvre capability, particularly that which draws the contributions of all three services together, takes us generations to create and we may need it sooner than we think.

There can be no doubt that European NATO, if I may use that term, faces a challenge of catering more effectively for its own defence in the face of the US rebalancing I alluded to earlier - something the *Financial Times* talks about today in its editorial. Notwithstanding the tremendous investment the US is making in developing coherent capability among its European NATO allies, which is a big effort. And whilst the US will, I am sure, maintain a global purview, and specific regional interests for example in the Middle East, we

can expect a relative disengagement from those areas where the US national interest is not so directly affected.

In the domestic context, political inclination for the UK to be involved in new operations is currently low, perhaps understandably so in light of the past decade of campaigning from which the strategic and political outcomes are being persistently questioned. So defending at home on the goal line may seem preferable for some to our traditional posture of trying to interrupt and defeat threats at distance. The Syria vote, a preference for stand-off engagement with precision weapons with limited landing engagement as we saw in Libya, are indications of this reticence, and in the case of the latter, we now understand better the limitations of such an approach.

We should be prepared for our potential adversaries to exploit this and we should beware of over correcting from the undeniably awkward experiences of the past decade. Ultimately history tells us that in some circumstances committing land forces may be the only way to achieve decisive outcomes in support of our strategic objectives. And we have only got to look to the tension in Ukraine to see a situation that was not foreseen and is confounding our previous assumptions about stability across Europe.

The key point here is not about the accuracy of our horizon-scanning and prediction; it's that the reliance at all on that sort of horizon-scanning and prediction tends not to stand the tests of time and history. And having ready forces send strategic messages to potential adversaries that will shape their behaviour towards us *ab initio* - i.e. they serve as a deterrent. And the sense of what some have described as moral disarmament in the West, after ten years of politically awkward campaigns and a false sense of negligible threats, may already be a factor in others' expectations of our reaction to provocation.

Defence is already reordering itself to sustain its key capabilities whilst developing new ones. You'll be aware that the Joint Forces Command was set up as a consequence of the last defence review to promote a number of new capabilities and to ensure a balance of investment between the single service environment, environmental imperatives - in our case for land, land force capability - and those operational level and wider enablers which have to be part of a sophisticated force mix if we are to remain a credible player in this evolving world.

And as part of this, the army is well down the path to reorganizing itself in accordance with the design that emanated from the 2010 defence review and

the subsequent three-month exercise, with three key roles for the army in mind:

First, our conventional contingency, deterrent, potential intervention and prevention-type capability. With the potential to mount such intervention and prevention operations calibrated to the modern context, which draws a lot on our experience of the operational environment in Afghanistan but also seeks to recognise that the future environment is not going to be a linear extrapolation of that and that we will have to, particularly in the early period after the conclusion of our combat operations in Afghanistan which we have, to be very wary about applying those experiences in a linear way - which puts considerable responsibility on our junior commanders.

The second key role is defence engagement, we which are here to talk about in more detail later.

And thirdly, the role of the army in the UK, both as a response to national crises as part of UK resilience, but also our engagement with the nation from which we will seek to draw the right talent amongst our officers and junior ranks into the army - the other two services are no different here - to generate a significantly larger and more rounded reserve in terms of its capability. And also as part of this, the relationship between the army and the nation to get the nation's buy-in to things like the military covenant which define the relationship between our military garrisons and local authorities and have quite a bearing on the way of life of our people.

So turning now to defence engagement specifically, the National Security Strategy of 2010 states that we must use all of our national capabilities to build our prosperity, extend our influence in the world, and strengthen our security. Furthermore it emphasises the UK's role on the global stage and demands a full and active engagement in world affairs. Now there's nothing new for us in working with regional partners and their military forces, we've been doing this for centuries in various guises. The army has a long history of working with our principal international allies in order to build strong alliances and deliver genuine military capability that has reaped dividends in numerous conflicts throughout the 20th and into the 21st century. Furthermore we have regularly worked with partner nations to develop their security capacity and increase stability in their regions alongside. So in doing so we are able to support the UK's overseas interests and counter many of the threats with the potential to impact on the United Kingdom and our own interests and our partners at distance.

Our current rationale, encapsulated in the Building Stability Overseas strategy and the International Defence Engagement Strategy - they don't necessarily roll off the tongue, but that's what we're doing – aim to contribute to the achievement of the following national objectives: first, to defend the UK, its overseas territories and interests; second, to deter threats to those interests; third, influence in support of those interests; fourth, promoting and protecting the UK's prosperity.

Then understanding other nations' security objectives, capabilities and intent; building international capability, capacity and will, and protecting UK citizens abroad - I mean that's the repertoire of objectives we are seeking to support.

And these strategies see four broad areas of activity that will go towards achieving these ends: first, protective security and intervention operations, of the sort of conventional deterrence style I mentioned earlier; second, defence diplomacy; third, defence and security exports; and fourthly, supporting regional stability and conflict prevention.

And the British Army while making valuable contributions to the first three of these, is well placed to support the latter – the last - through post-conflict reconstruction stabilisation, through counter-proliferation, arms control, peace-keeping (of which I would expect us to be doing more under a UN guise in the future), security sector reform activity, stabilisation, conflict prevention and reduction.

And within this range of activities, I'd highlight the following lines of work. First, strengthening our bilateral relationships of which of course the defence element is only one part - but it tends to be a relatively significant one and it does tend to underpin a nation's inclination to want to do business with us. Building regional capacity to enable problems to be dealt with more responsibly by local forces with a natural understanding, and who may not suffer from the sense of xenophobia that we sometimes create when we turn up with our forces in those countries. Building our own understanding of local politics, culture, and the operating environment in places where we have a particular interest and where we think if all else fails we may need to intervene.

Here the education and training of our own people is key. A cadre of highly motivated, well- trained and experienced diplomat soldiers, or what might have been called in the past Soldier-Sahibs, who understand that every tactical activity must be set in a political context, will turn out to be a force multiplier. Within this context individual experience built up over time will be

important to allow political antennae to be best tuned to identify threats and opportunities. This reinforces the requirement for us to take a strategic view of this enterprise, selecting and prioritising where these activities are going to take place will be very important, because we can't be put everywhere and spread too thinly - our resources will not deliver the right outcomes.

Now, some of these things can be achieved by relatively small investments as part of a persistent engagement plan to seek to enhance our security, protect interests and prevent threats to the UK.

And I'm clear that our credibility in doing this work is fundamentally underpinned by our own operational credentials, by our reputation, our war-fighting capability, and our ethos. Defence engagement is definitely not a substitute for our own fighting power, for our competence, our military acuity, or for our significant operational experience, it is absolutely dependent on it. No organization wants its military to be trained or supported by an organization that is not from the first division so our utility in this space will be a function of perceptions of our competence.

At the same time, defence engagement should be seen as the efficient and intelligent global application of our capabilities, perhaps as a priority when they're not in demand for putative conflicts or deployments at high relevance - i.e. what we're doing here is we're using our forces in a routine day to day way, in a structured format rather than having them sitting at high readiness waiting for the call to come for something that's a more deliberate military intervention or prevention operation. The creation of the army's adaptable force, which sits alongside the reaction force, the higher readiness deployed forces from the army, in the army 2020 construct provides us with a powerful mechanism through which to focus this contribution to defence engagement.

Headquarters of the 1st (United Kingdom) Division which is soon to return to York from Germany - it's resided in Germany since 1945 so this is going to be a bit of a change for them - is going to assume responsibility for the support and oversight of defence engagement and channelling the activities of these adaptable force brigades who are going to take on responsibility for delivering activity within nine specified regions of the globe. This enduring alignment will allow them to be flexible in role, reasonably dynamic in applying their wares, adaptable in execution, and it offers us a dedicated command and control structure to improve and develop our activity. Because inevitably there will be a fair degree of learning on the job as we accentuate our activities in this space. Notwithstanding our heritage in the past, the current cohort has much to learn about how to do this in the modern world.

So, the brigade commanders of those nine organizations I mentioned have already begun to work closely with military attachés and in-country staff from other government departments in their respective areas of interest and responsibility, and it's not our intention that every service that they're asked to provide will come from within their own brigade organization – and I'll explain why that is in a minute.

But they will facilitate appropriate deployments from across the army which will in some areas include training being conducted by the armoured forces of the reaction force, or maybe the airborne forces of the reaction force, and of course where appropriate the wider defence, because we are acting as an engagement and liaison node for all the capabilities that defence can generate. And so, for example, you'll see situations where, in those countries where marine capability is provided by the army, we would lay that off to our pals in the Royal Marines. We are not here, we are not building empires here, we are trying to act responsibly to deliver the most cohesive effect from the UK defence portfolio.

So it's our intention that over time these brigades will gain regional, national, cultural and individual understanding of the personalities in their chosen, delegated space. They will understand the issues that are key drivers in how those countries are functioning, how they are reacting to their local security challenges. And through these enduring relationships, our people will develop an individual and collective ability to operate in those environments, including foreign language skills and cultural awareness with much greater acuity than we have tended to do so of late. And we have got to remember how uncomfortable we found it in the early days of Basra and Helmand Province for want of linguistic, cultural and tribal knowledge - these were serious impediments to our effect, and they were also interestingly a source of significant disappointment to the local people who had heard, because they had been told by their ancestors, how knowledgeable ours had been in those areas.

And no amount of tactical proficiency, which we had naively seen as the decisive issue, was going to compensate for a lack of acuity in applying that commendable tactical proficiency with the grain of tribal politics and local culture.

The key to all of this is persistent engagement and persistent approach, and if we take the Gulf region as an example, we've tended not to achieve this very well. Many of you will know General Simon Mayall our special advisor to the Middle East from the department who, if I paraphrase him, his message is we

would have benefitted hugely from a long-term plan for the region over the past forty years. We have actually had something akin to a one-year plan, forty times: not good use of resources.

It's probably also worth noting here that while recognising the sensitive nature of the subject in some quarters, defence sales, as well as contributing directly to the prosperity of the UK, helps to tie us into long term alliances and partnerships. The sale of equipment to overseas partners with long-term training support contracts is a good basis for this.

In concept, upstream engagement and overseas capacity building, if properly targeted and resourced, should deliver benefits to us and they should help our role in global stability by reducing - but probably not removing - the need for us to deploy in future on much more costly intervention and prevention operations.

So what does this defence engagement actually look like in practice? The scope of activity ranges widely from our commitment to military attachés and defence sections in our embassies and high commissions, through to our efforts to build credible security forces in the aftermath of conflict - such as we are doing in Afghanistan now, and we have done also in the past in Iraq and Sierra Leone. The army regularly contributes special advisors in niche areas, what we call short-term training teams, in areas of military activity as diverse as ceremonial duties, military music, counter IED (Improvised Explosive Device) skills - which are in demand at the moment by dint of the lessons we've learned in the fairly harsh environment of Afghanistan. Military human resources systems, and how to train military working dogs to things like search - I mean the list is endless. To provide mentors to foreign senior military officers, to place our lone service embedded teams alongside host nation forces, to send our students to overseas staff colleges, and to take part in multinational overseas exercises. On the reciprocal side, we host hundreds of overseas military personnel to our training courses, which are greatly in demand in places like Sandhurst, for example, and the staff college.

And the British Army brand remains very strong. Training with, and working alongside us- the British Army, and the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force would be saying the same thing - remains a popular objective for many foreign forces. We remain a benchmark force by many people's standards. This isn't a one-way street. We have much to learn from our allies and partners, and if we engage properly in this area, this will not be seen, and neither will it in practice be, a one-way street. It will be something that allows us to grow our understanding to our great benefit on future operations. And

the nature of many of our exercise programmes means we're able to provide plenty of challenge and adventure for our own people, which is very important, because they are looking for some form of challenge and adventure on the back of the sort of thing that they were getting in a plentiful way on operations in Afghanistan. And so we're looking to have an active army that is contributing to UK strategy and allows us to attract and retain the talent that we're going to need for the broader military challenges of the future.

It's also going to help us with an expeditionary mindset - an aspect that will be increasingly important - as by the end of the decade the vast majority of the army will be based in mainland UK for the first time for many centuries.

In terms of maximising the impact of our defence engagement we're looking to capitalise on areas where we've a natural advantage due to our historic roots and relationships. And from the defence perspective we're looking at how we link up our strong presence in much of the Middle East in a more coherent manner. Our two pilot schemes for defence engagement have been in the Maghreb and in the Gulf with 4th Mechanized Brigade and 51st Infantry Brigade respectively and I'm delighted to report that I believe this is, has been, a pretty successful start which has won support across Whitehall and where ambassadors at post have been very keen to exploit the potential for building and sustaining better relationships with the countries they're responsible for.

There's been quite a lot of routine training activity already; I would add in for example 160 (Wales) Brigade who have now an embryonic training programme in Kazakhstan with reciprocal opportunities for training in Wales. I think that's just but one example of doing something in a much more elegant way that we would have done either not at all or fairly clunkily hitherto. So this needs to be appealing and satisfying work for our people, it needs to provide them with educational and intellectual stimulus, and it needs to see them properly rewarded so we're designing a specific career path to up our game and reward our people accordingly. And one of the things I fear as the army gets more stable and resident in the UK, and as our officers and soldiers who have families are increasingly dependent on more than one income in order to sustain the sort of lifestyle that they want, is that we retain a spirit of frontier soldiering where families are prepared to travel abroad and to work in these cultures and environments that I've described to you. I think that's very important.

We're not the only players in the game. The Royal Navy's been doing this sort of thing throughout its existence, very successfully, and ditto the Royal Air Force for all of its nearly 100 years, where it's trained and run many partner air forces. So we can see this as a tri-service package, mutually supporting, and in the more sophisticated case, we will be delivering joint activity where on big exercises in certain regions once in a while I would expect to see that happen - the sort of thing that in the past we've done in Oman under the Saif Sareea series of exercises for example.

Now we're not the only people doing this, many other nations including the US and several of our European partners recognise the benefits of this approach and are developing similar strategies. The US Regionally Aligned Forces programme is the most advanced of these and one that we are very conscious we need to work alongside, complement, and collaborate with such that our activities are reinforcing rather than interfering. We've got much to learn here and it's instructive to study the recent French interventions in Mali and the Central African Republic where conspicuously successful military operations could be seen to have their roots firmly in protracted engagement and genuine expertise and understanding in the region over time.

So what?

Well the army recognises that its tactical capabilities are but one implement in a complex cross-government and multi-national defence engagement toolkit. These tools have to be applied in a political context that takes heed of regional considerations likely to be beyond our direct control. The FCO and DFID with their global reach and extensive regional and local knowledge will be critical to focus our defence engagement contribution to best effect. So there's quite a lot of cross-government coordination needed and that's happening already in Whitehall with some effective, relatively light touch prioritisation and coordination mechanisms. And I would think we will see that growing over time, building on the excellent relationships we have with our cross-Whitehall partners from recent operations. And we shouldn't limit it to those agencies. Meshing with NGOs and private security organizations is likely to also be important if we are going to get the best result out of this and we are working out with some nations who would like to have private enterprises working alongside us as the military just how to do that with one or two of our partners.

By way of conclusion, security, stability and prosperity are tightly intertwined aspects of the modern functioning nation. Spawned by the NSS (the National Security Strategy) in its post-modern form in 2010, defence engagement is

set to play an increasingly important part in the achievement of our national security objectives. The prime minister has observed that if we can help deliver security and help provide stability, that is then the base on which all development can proceed. In the post-Afghan era as UK forces return to contingency and the army restructures to meet the demands of the 21st century, defence is in the healthy position of having the tools it requires to deliver across the broad range of activities that are defined by the defence engagement strategy. Persistent engagement overseas by the British Army protects our interests, allows us to mitigate threats and identify and exploit opportunities. It also gives us a stark opportunity better to educate our people. And within the army the adaptable force will be championing this cause, allowing us to maximise the positive nature of this impact and deliver broad-ranging effect in support of national security objectives.