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**BUILDING A BRITISH MILITARY FIT FOR FUTURE CHALLENGES RATHER THAN
PAST CONFLICTS**

- Well it is a great pleasure to be here tonight. Chatham House enjoys international respect for the quality of its independent and critical thought. So it is, I believe, wholly appropriate that, as part of the Ministry of Defence's public engagement on the Strategic Defence and Security Review I share some thoughts with you this evening.
- It is also important to reflect that this talk falls on the formal 75th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain. I say this because I wholly revere, as do we all, the remarkable contribution of the Royal Air Force to protecting our country from an undeniably existential threat 75 years ago.
- But it is also somewhat ironic that in 2015, this SDSR year, we as a country are spending so much of our national time in emotional reflection on war. Agincourt, Waterloo, Gallipoli, the Battle of Britain, Iraq, Afghanistan. Next year we will commemorate Jutland. For various immaculate reasons wars or battles such as these have been branded on our national psyche.
- As a result I sometimes worry that many have come to view our Armed Forces solely through the optic of war. Our utility has come to be assessed through individual and collective audits of war's occasionally questionable benefits. This, I strongly believe, hugely misjudges the beneficial utility of military power.
- So, if I have a more personal aspiration for this talk, and for the SDSR more generally, it is to bring about a re-imagining of the utility of the Nation's Armed Forces. Rather than view them through the optic of fighting wars; view them through the optic of the wars we avoid having to fight; the stability we help assure; the prosperity we help achieve; and the liberty and open society we help preserve.

- Because, as I will attempt to explain, many of the threats we face today are not existential to our survival as a nation in the classic physical sense. But they are existential to our way of life; to our prosperity, our national values, our individual liberty and to our sense of our nation's place in the world. These threats will take a particular and bespoke strategy to defeat, or at least to ameliorate.
- As I say this talk is part of our public engagement on the SDSR, so it is meant to be a catalyst for questions and inputs to a process that still has its most interesting and challenging phases ahead of it. For, although it has been underway for some time, there is much left to be decided. Specifically there are some important decisions to be made about our national ambition; our national risk appetite; some hard choices on capability options; and also on what we call security postures... or how we use and employ our national security capabilities.
- One thing I would say at the outset is that, in very stark contrast to where we might have been, this summer's budget settlement for Defence has given us the opportunity to make choices in this SDSR which are about betterment rather than decline; about reviewing the scale and nature of the security risks to the country and reducing them. This is hugely welcome.
- But this does not make this SDSR an easy ride. Far from it. As I will indicate, over the last five years the world has become a more, not less, dangerous place. It has become ever more difficult to distinguish between transient threats of a non-existential nature and those threats which pose a more enduring danger to our national interest over time.
- And although the financial settlement for Defence is real and welcome, its most significant benefits will only materialise in the later years of this parliament. The early benefits lay in a much better-founded ability to deliver the programme envisaged in SDSR 2010. Capability enhancements will rely heavily on new efficiencies which we are now incentivised to achieve and in our ability to compete successfully for the new £1.5 billion Joint Security Fund.

- The SDSR will inevitably lead, by the end of the year, to a number of choices about capability. Those choices will, in the main, be made on the grounds of political judgements about national ambition, security risk tolerance and available resources.
- In offering such choices to government, officials across Whitehall are trying to create the best possible informed judgements about the risks we must contend with, our national interests, the national security objectives that will deliver those interests, and the policy and capability choices which will best secure those objectives given the global security context which confronts us.
- It is not my aim tonight to give you a comprehensive view of where we have progressed with this complex synthesis. Rather I want to give you my sense of the global security context; to draw some deductions from that context; and finally to describe some of the capability and posture choices that derive from those deductions and about which some very difficult decisions will have to be made.
- So let me start with the global security context. This is a personal not departmental formulation, it is delivered from personal judgement, a military perspective and is devoid of the optimism bias that some can indulge in. I offer seven thematic observations. The context is one of uncertainty; of instability; of significant threat diversification; of an increasing complexity in inter-state relationships; of the advent of the power of the narrative; of ever greater constraint on the use of force; and of an ever more revealed mismatch between the capabilities we have and those that we need to meet the multiple demands of the current operating environment. I will offer a few words on each.
- The uncertainty which continues to endure is borne of the inevitability of change. That change is driven by at least two strategic factors. The first is the relative decline in economic and demographic terms of what you might call Old Europe and the seemingly inevitable rise of the Asia-Pacific region.

- The second factor driving uncertainty is the first indications that America may be starting to realise the finite nature of her own power and particularly her ability, or societal willingness, to remain the external security guarantor of three regions of the world: Europe; the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific. However premature such a judgement is, it is nevertheless a cause of uncertainty in the regions that may be affected.
- My second observation of the global security context is the prevalence of instability. Instability defines the Middle East and both North and Sub-Saharan Africa. It is China's greatest internal concern. It is increasingly the condition of Russia's near abroad. It is not confined to land alone, but is a maritime phenomenon in the Gulf of Guinea, the Mediterranean, the East and South China Seas and elsewhere.
- The pervading condition of instability and the individual despair that it generates is one of the causes of mass migration. But, perhaps, the more important thing to recognise is that one of the strongest drivers of this instability is a sense, amongst several nations and at least one great religion, that the current world order denies them a sense of their historic entitlement and to the enjoyment of their rightful place in the world. In some ways we are inextricably a part of an upheaval in the balance of power between states over-time and in other ways we are seeing the state-based model of international order challenged by other views of how the world should be arranged.
- My third observation is of the diversification of threats. It probably holds true that an existential threat to the United Kingdom in classic, symmetrical, force-on-force, terms is still remote. But Russia now presents a threat in more novel ways to several of our NATO Allies; and potentially, if not handled well, to the coherence of NATO as an Alliance. In some of our responses we must be careful not to assume that Russia's rationality mirrors our own.
- More widely the threats from in particular terrorism, but also from cyber attack, organised crime, mass migration, natural disaster, energy shortages and much else, all continue to increase. And the emerging outcome of the government review of national security risks, is that we confront a greater range of more serious threats than five years ago; and that these threats could manifest themselves in compound form.

- My next observation is that the nature of inter-state relationships grows ever more complex as global interdependencies increase. It is absolutely possible for two countries to be in a state of cooperation, competition, confrontation and conflict at one and the same time. Economic cooperation goes hand in hand with competition for trade and markets. Localised and regionalised confrontation over unresolved land disputes abound. Conflict dominates deniable activity in cyberspace. It no longer holds true that our enemy's enemy is our friend. Reflect, if you will, on Syria, Iraq, Iran and Da'ish.
- My fifth observation relates to the significant increase in the power of a potent narrative. This is but one element of Information Age Warfare. Through most of history the primary purpose of military operations has been achieved through physical activity. Physical activity, destruction and geographic advantage has been the means to influence the cognitive domain of war. But nowadays almost all acts of physical violence come with an on-line component, exploiting social networks to manipulate opinion and perception. The tactics employed by Russia in Ukraine, Estonia and Georgia, include combinations of information warfare, cyber activity, counter-intelligence, espionage, economic warfare and the sponsorship of proxies.
- In Syria, Iraq and increasingly in our own homelands, Da'ish's use of messaging and propaganda is more potent than its conventional military capability. Da'ish uses Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in 23 different languages. The information age, more widely, permits adversaries unconstrained by western policy, ethical and legal codes, to exploit and assault our vulnerabilities.
- My final two observations are borne primarily of reflection on our own national condition, but they are shared in part or in full by many other western nations. The first is that we are experiencing ever greater constraints on our freedom to use force.
- Some of these constraints relate to advances in the technological competence of potential enemies and their ability to generate anti-access and area denial capabilities. But the more worrying constraints on the use of force lay in the areas of societal support, parliamentary consent and ever greater legal challenge.

- Such constraints are particularly significant when the desire to commit to the use of force is in support of operations which some might consider discretionary to the vital national interest. And such constraints may impact on our ability to generate deterrence, which wholly depends on the perceivable credibility of our willingness to use force if necessary. My point here is that if a nation's assumed willingness to commit to the use of force is only in the face of national survival, then we encourage rather than deter revisionist states and their own ambitions.
- My final observation is the growing potential mis-match between the current silhouette of Armed Forces capability and the growing demand for action in a contemporary environment constantly requiring effective responses to crisis. Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of the intelligence and strike assets needed to counter terrorism at range. To some our Armed Forces remain stubbornly optimised for episodic combat at scale, whereas the contemporary environment demands multiple, concurrent responses of high readiness force packages optimised for a whole range of crises: from striking terrorists to eliminating Ebola.
- What deductions should we draw from all of this? Well my first deduction is really drawn from the first two observations: the inevitability of change and the prevalence of instability brought about by the challenges to the current global order.
- The simple fact is that, seen over time, the United Kingdom has done pretty well out of the post 1945, post-Cold War, international settlement and the rules based system which is part of that. Our remarkable retention of geo-political status, relative prosperity and our enviable open society rests significantly on our ability to retain that rules based system and the global stability that is needed to underpin it.
- So we must be careful to balance our Defence and Security responses between those threats which demand immediate action and those threats which present as a more incremental but potentially more enduring danger to our national interest over time.

- Personally I remain convinced that the Grand Strategic security challenge of the age for the United Kingdom, is how we manage to accommodate the change that is inevitable, whilst at the same time maintaining the stability of the global commons and the rules based international system on which our prosperity, status and open society depend.
- My second deduction is that there is no longer a simple distinction between war and peace. We are in a state of permanent engagement in a global competition. To win or even survive in such a competition means that all the instruments of national power need constantly to be in play. In this context we do need to re-imagine the utility of the Armed Forces beyond the simple construct of fighting wars or preparing for the next one.
- To an extent non-war fighting tasks such as deterrence, reassurance, capacity building, peace-keeping, stabilisation and Defence engagement have always been features of what our Armed Forces have done. But, most recently at least, they have not been organised as a strategic endeavour in the context of our most vital national interest.
- My third deduction is that most of the threats we face cannot be resolved by decisive military action alone. Terrorism, Hybrid War, Compound threats and War in the Information Age need sophisticated all-of-government approaches. Economic sanctions may prove a more effective lever than military coercion. The importance of a convincing strategic narrative is vital against the dis-information of Russia or the powerful seduction of extremist ideology, magnified as it is through the power of social media. And, across government, we need to organise even better to provide a harmonised response to the threats we face.
- My fourth deduction is that we cannot face these threats alone. The importance of achieving collective security through alliances is vital to any enterprise that needs to be conducted at scale. It is also vital to our ability to manage risk in a context in which we cannot afford a national inventory to face all threats. In this context an effective NATO is essential, not least because NATO is the only organisation which can credibly integrate conventional and nuclear deterrence. But our other bi-lateral and multi-lateral arrangements are also important, and many of these we only achieve by retaining the status of reference Armed Forces, capable of leading coalitions as well as acting independently in our own right.

- My final deduction, and one I absolutely share with my fellow chiefs, is the need to be completely honest about the capability start point for this SDSR. In SDSR 2010, the financial crisis forced government to make some difficult choices when setting Future Force 2020. Specific risks were taken, warfighting resilience reduced, certain capability gaps accepted. The choices we make in this SDSR must both start to put this right and address the new threats we face.
- So, my final set of comments relate to those choices. In outlining such choices to you I am not going to list a catalogue of pet projects. Rather I will offer them as packages of capability that address our requirements in generic terms. And I will also say something about postures.
- The first set of capability choices lay in the requirement to make good some of our deficiencies in warfighting resilience. This is a broad menu. It stretches from adequate spares provision, to ammunition and missile holdings, to better force protection, to maximising the advantage of the current sunk costs in expensive platforms such as the carriers.
- The second set of choices is to regain or sustain the organisational status of our Armed Forces in structural terms. In simple terms this means to fully develop the power-projection capability of the Maritime Taskgroup; to reprioritise the deployable Divisional level of manoeuvre of the Army; and to increase the available Combat Air Mass of the Air Force.
- A significant amount of these first two choices can be achieved through changes to structure and productivity rather than simply by buying new things. But we need to make these choices to underwrite and contribute to conventional deterrence, strategic influence and national ambition. Our choices in this respect, particularly in respect of resilience, also need to include infrastructure, manpower and training, so we ensure that the force does not become hollow. Particularly we need to address some of our critical manpower challenges. The greatest risks which the Defence Board faces relate to our ability to recruit and retain skilled people. This is a national not just Defence issue.

- In the context of retaining strategic authority we will have some choices to make about de-risking the nuclear enterprise in respect of both its protection and the seamless delivery of a successor deterrent. I say this because we cannot afford to take risk against a deterrent the effectiveness of which fundamentally relies on its invulnerability and continuous availability. So this is non-discretionary.
- But, to me, the most interesting package of choices in this SDSR lay in what we call the Joint Forces Command Proposition. Five years ago in SDSR 2010 the Joint Forces Command did not exist and, in the context of a response to the strategic shock of austerity, few people championed the cause of Joint Enablement. The advent of Joint Forces Command has meant we have already started to invest in this vital area.
- We now need to build on this investment and increase our capacity to conduct Intelligence, Surveillance and Target Acquisition. Our capacity for multiple deployed Command and Control must increase in number and reduce in bulk. In combination our C4ISR must make possible operations in the information age: exploiting mega data, social media, processing power and miniaturisation.
- We must also continue to reset the capabilities of our Special Forces to both achieve strategic insight and to restore a capacity for strategic strike at range, at speed and with enhanced security in otherwise denied areas.
- Separately the JFC is the champion of our Cyber Defence and offensive capabilities and I strongly believe that, in offensive capability terms, we are still in the foothills of understanding and exploiting the potency of this new domain of warfare and the degree to which it might replace or complement more conventional approaches to deterrence, coercion and, if necessary, warfighting.
- There is much more in the Joint Forces Command package. But I highlight its priority in this SDSR because it pulls a three card trick. It meets much of the immediate demand for enhanced counter terrorist capability; it enables the better exploitation of the conventional force structure; and it moves us into a greater realisation of the way to conduct warfare in the information age.

- The final set of choices I would offer may not generate the headlines they deserve. But if we are going to stay ahead of the game then we need to spend more, and more wisely on innovation. Only through technical innovation, which properly harnesses the potential of robotics, micro-processing, novel materials and unmanned flight, to name but the most obvious, will we be able to maintain technological advantage, resolve the challenges of anti-access and area denial capability and address the long term issue of manpower costs. And our approach to innovation must be more than technical, it must be intellectual, temperamental and doctrinal as well.
- In respect of how we posture the Armed Forces, we should reflect on my comments on the need to significantly enhance the pro-active use of a far greater amount of our capability. For example, more of the force structure will need to be active in protection, deterrence and reassurance tasks, including the more active protection of home waters and air space; and a greater routine contribution to NATO's deterrent posture. We have neglected some aspects of homeland security beyond our responses to terrorism and particularly in the context of Critical National Infrastructure.
- A second change in how we posture the force will be in how we contribute to shaping a more stable world. This is an amalgam of tasks which include Defence Engagement, Capacity Building, supporting regional strategies, working with allies and partners to enhance effective security. This will involve additional resources in order to maintain deployed footprints and fund enhanced activity levels. But such activity will also be a key enabler of Defence's contribution to our wider national prosperity agenda.
- But the third, and perhaps most significant change in force posture, will be in our preparedness to manage crisis through agile response. So, a force structure which must ultimately be capable of force projection at scale, must nevertheless optimise its routine posture so it is able to respond to the multiple, small scale demands, which are the defining feature of today's operating environment. And some of this, through the mechanism of the UK's Joint Expeditionary Force Pool, will be multinational by design.
- Now, it will be very evident to you that the combination of capability choices and force posture options which I have outlined will most definitely aggregate to a resource bill that we cannot meet instantaneously. The capability choices will, therefore, need to be

prioritised and the criteria for prioritisation are still being agreed. Clearly, a priority must go to those capabilities which offer the ability to mitigate the most serious and proximate threats. Countering terrorism will be high on this list. The regulator will be the requirement to accept risk elsewhere; and we must do this consciously. An SDSR cannot resolve all our security problems in a moment. Strategic patience will be a virtue.

- I cannot yet judge how this SDSR will turn out in respect of the detailed outcomes. But I do have considerable faith that the intellectual framework to deliver a coherent outcome is in place. If I have one residual concern it is that, in our haste to realise efficiency in order to improve capability, we will inflict self-harm in respect of our manpower. We must guard against this, since a failure to attract and retain talent is the most serious risk to our overall capability and, therefore, our national security.
- And, finally; I do worry that some people will aspire for an SDSR of falsely assumed perfection, one which delivers a single strategic outcome in which Ends, Ways and Means are locked in perfect harmony and which does not need to be worried about for another five years. I do not believe that the contemporary world allows for such an approach.
- Strategy, to me, like helicopter flight, is inherently unstable and often very noisy. Our approach must be adaptive, constantly revisiting ends, ways and means to ensure that coherence is maintained; accepting risk when it is manageable, constantly seeking optimum ways of doing things and only compromising ambition when absolutely necessary.
- If pressed, therefore, to describe a military fit for future challenges rather than past conflicts, it is a military that embraces the need for continuous adaptation which I would favour: a military imbued with the spirit of innovation rather than preservation. A military, you might reflect, not a million miles, in human terms, from the Royal Air Force of 1940. It will be an interesting few weeks; and your input will be welcome.