

Delivering Security in a Changing World

Annual Chief of the Defence Staff Lecture

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General Sir Michael Walker is the Chief of the Defence Staff. This article is based on the RUSI Annual Chief of the Defence Staff Lecture, which he delivered on 9 December 2003

This article will highlight some of the themes and purposes of the 2003 Defence White Paper, explain why we have produced it and what it will mean for our Armed Forces. I would also like to set aside some of the myths about this document.

It has been a tough few years for our servicemen and women – and I do not forget their families at home when I say this – with deployments to all corners of the world on a variety of scales, not least the conflict in Iraq this last year. I need not remind readers that some of them, sadly, did not return home. What is clear is that in that war, and on all their operations, they have upheld the best traditions of all three Services, performing magnificently in combat, and behaving impeccably in victory. I am extremely proud to be their chief.

The White Paper had been a long time coming. Whilst it partly represents the drawing together of the work we have done since 11 September 2001, it also brings up to date our thinking since the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) of 1998.

That review was a comprehensive examination of our plans and posture in the wake of the Cold War, and as we faced up to a less predictable world of new threats. Its essential conclusions about flexibility and the need to invest in expeditionary warfare remain broadly correct in the new strategic environment and are a testament to the thoroughness of the work.

However, it is a central tenet of military thinking that planning cannot stand still. We must always do our best to be one step ahead. Of course, not everything is predictable, and we did not see the strategic effects of the

terrible attacks in New York and Washington. Within a few weeks of 9/11, British forces were in combat in Afghanistan, US foreign policy had changed course and NATO had invoked Article Five of the North Atlantic Treaty for the first time in its history.

Afghanistan was far from an isolated case. This need to operate both in small-scale, fluid situations and to retain an ability to undertake large-scale combat operations has been amply demonstrated recently. Our Armed Forces have been engaged in successful combat operations in Iraq this year, and are still heavily involved in post-conflict activities. And over the past five years we have also conducted a number of small to medium scale operations – often concurrently – across three continents in countries such as Kosovo, Macedonia, Sierra Leone, East Timor, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

To digress for a moment, nor should we forget the activities we have undertaken on the domestic front as un-resourced contingent tasks at home, involving fire strikes, floods, fuel and foot and mouth – the four 'Fs' instantaneously converted into the eight 'Fs' by our men and women.

We have managed these tasks well, partly thanks to the drive and professionalism of our people and partly thanks to the good work at policy level we undertook in the SDR and, later, in the New Chapter. Part of what we do in defence, albeit not the best-known part, is to look ahead and plan for the world of tomorrow. Much of this thinking is contained within the White Paper. I'd like to share a little of that thinking with you now.



Troops from the Royal Regiment of Wales on patrol in Basra, attempting to restore calm following local protests over jobs and pay.

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Future Trends and Challenges

The trend towards more frequent, small to medium scale operations is likely to continue. It is a paradigm shift from the strategic stability that characterized the Cold War years that still bears a legacy in some areas of our Force structures and capabilities, an area I shall explore in more depth in a moment.

Over the next thirty years large-scale conventional attack on the UK is very remote. However, new threats are emerging: WMD proliferation, the threat posed by international terrorism and the consequences of failing or failed states present us with real and immediate challenges.

Yet it is clear that the global security environment continues to change rapidly – arguably more so today than at any other time in history. Therefore, the key themes for the way we need to position ourselves to meet these increasingly diverse and fleeting threats are agility, flexibility and adaptability.

The context in which these changes will happen is reflected by two fundamental tenets of our security and defence policy: the security and stability of Europe on the one hand and the maintenance of the vital transatlantic relationship on the other. In addition, globalization and

increasing inter-connectivity means that the UK security and national prosperity depend upon broad global stability, freedom and economic development. In support of these, the UK Armed Forces will continue to seek to act as a 'force for good' within the international community.

Those regions immediately adjacent to Europe – the Former Soviet Union, the Middle East and North Africa – are likely to continue to have the most significant bearing on both our own and wider Western security interests. Potentially destabilizing social, political, and economic problems demand that we – and others across Whitehall – engage in conflict prevention, as well as being able to respond quickly to emerging crises.

The Middle East presents the most significant security challenges within this broad area. The Israeli/Palestinian problem is the central issue and the UK will continue to support international efforts to secure a fair and lasting settlement. The UK would want to play its part in any future peace support operation required under such a settlement. The Gulf will remain a region of considerable strategic importance, with its energy supplies being crucial to the world economy.

Looking beyond the regions adjacent to Europe, we now need to take a greater account in our planning of a high likelihood of future commitments further afield, including dealing with WMD or international terrorism. Crises could occur anywhere across the world and the UK will not be able, nor required, to help in every case. We will therefore focus on those areas where we have strong historical ties, responsibilities or major investments.

Sub-Saharan Africa is likely to remain a poverty-stricken and unstable region. We do not perceive a direct threat to UK security but ongoing conflict and instability in the region is likely to perpetuate a situation of recurring humanitarian disasters. As Sierra Leone has illustrated, there is a political and moral desire to assist and encourage – with the EU and other partners – good governance and security sector reform to set the conditions for security in the region.

Peace support operations are ongoing in Afghanistan and instability in parts of South Asia will require a significant level of engagement. When faced with evolving threats and new challenges, we must not always assume that the best response will be a military one. Diplomatic, political and economic

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levers are often more effective. Our Armed Forces will also continue to conduct a broad range of non-operational international activities to stabilize and strengthen the global security climate. Defence relations activities will address the causes of conflict by building regional confidence, reducing tensions and deepening understanding and trust on all sides, through a variety of arms control, counter proliferation, security sector reform and defence education initiatives. In simple terms, if we can play our part in a cross-governmental drive to replace anger with hope, our security will directly benefit.

Where military action is required, it is best exercised through alliances, partnerships and co-operation. The ability to be interoperable with friends and allies will be vital as more and more operations rely on multilateral action. This will require investment in technology and, by definition, not only by the UK. The UN will remain the forum through which the international community will debate the handling of major security crises.

Established relationships and coalition frameworks provide a strong base from which to assemble a military response and facilitate planning, deployment and operations. NATO and the European Union will be the key organizations through which we act. NATO will remain the basis for our collective defence and for crisis management in the Euro-Atlantic area. It is also the key transatlantic organization through which the US will engage with its allies in planning and conducting military operations. The EU – through the European Security and Defence Policy – will provide a complementary

organization through which to act when NATO is not involved.

However, both NATO and the EU will need to further develop their expeditionary and crisis management capabilities in order to be effective forces in the changing world. NATO members embraced this concept at the Prague Summit and agreed to develop a more capable military Alliance to meet crises and contingencies as they arise. The catalyst for this capability development will be the NATO Response Force, with its emphasis on flexible, deployable and interoperable forces – a key indicator of the desire of NATO members to transform the Alliance.

The UK is a strong supporter of developing EU military capability on a basis that complements NATO. The EU, with its focus on crisis management operations outside the Union, has now established an operational Common Security and Defence Policy and the military structures required to support it, though shortfalls remain to be met before the Helsinki Headline Goal is achieved in full. The EU has already conducted limited Peace Support Operations in both Macedonia and the Democratic Republic of Congo but considerable progress, particularly in developing relevant and credible capabilities, will be necessary if the full aspirations set out in the Headline Goal are to be met.

Multiple concurrent small to medium sized operations will be the most significant factor in our force planning. Counter-terrorism and counter proliferation operations in particular will require rapidly deployable forces able to respond swiftly to intelligence and achieve precise effects across the world. This places a premium on the agility,

deployability and sustainability of our forces and on the enhancement of key strategic enablers – communications, logistics and intelligence.

Within this, however, we will maintain a broad spectrum of maritime, land, air, logistics, C4ISR and Special Forces capability elements to ensure we are able to conduct limited national operations, or be the lead or framework nation for coalition operations, at the small to medium scale. But we must also retain the capacity to undertake large-scale operations at longer notice.

However, the most demanding expeditionary operations, involving intervention against state adversaries, can only plausibly be conducted if US forces are engaged, either leading a coalition or in NATO. Where the UK chooses to be involved we must be able to influence political and military decision-making throughout the crisis. Consequently, our Armed Forces will need to be interoperable with US command and control structures, maintain the US operational tempo and provide those capabilities that deliver the greatest impact when operating alongside the US. The key to retaining interoperability with the US, for our European allies as well as the UK, is likely to rest in the successful operation of NATO's new Allied Command for Transformation.

Flexible and Deployable

I turn now to some of the ways in which we will build these more flexible and deployable forces. Historically, military capability has been measured in terms of units or number of platforms. The push then was to acquire sheer volume – to ensure success against possible opponents in a war of attrition.

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But in today's environment, success will be achieved through an ability to act quickly, accurately and decisively so as to deliver critical effect at the right moment. We will speak in terms of capabilities and effects.

The Critical elements in delivering military effect will be: sensors – to gather information; an effective network – to fuse, communicate and exploit the information; and strike assets – to deliver the decisive action.

Technology will be a key driver for change and will present us with new opportunities – for example the effective means by which to link 'sensor to shooter' through Network Enabled Capabilities, or NEC. We plan to invest significant resources in NEC and are already procuring a range of sensors, including airborne stand-off surveillance battlefield electronic warfare capabilities, and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles through the Watchkeeper programme. We are investing in digitized communications systems to provide the heart of the 'network'. Both Bowman, at the tactical level, and Falcon, at the operational level, will improve communication and understanding of strategic and military intent throughout the chain of command. We are also developing new systems to collate, analyze and distribute information. Through NEC, the command structure will improve its responsiveness to events on the ground and have the flexibility to respond in near real-time to fleeting targets. The final pieces of the jigsaw are the precision attack capabilities represented by submarine launched Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles, air delivered long-range cruise missiles,

precision guided munitions, and a range of land and Special Forces.

However, the introduction of any new technology – and Network Enabled Capabilities are no exception – are only effective when employed by highly trained, professional forces. Alongside the investment in Network Enabled equipments, we will also invest in the people that operate them to ensure they have the skills to realize the potential benefits.

One of the reasons for the excellent reputation of the UK's Armed Forces is the professionalism of the troops that serve in them and we intend to maintain and maximize this advantage. Our ability to develop an effective expeditionary capability will depend on our ability to sustain sufficient, trained and motivated Armed Forces Personnel. Developing and sustaining our 'personnel capability' – in parallel with our equipment and logistic capabilities – is essential and we are developing a new Service Personnel Plan to better manage delivery in this critical area.

The norm for Service Personnel will be individual mobility with frequent deployments and consequent separation from families. Training and deployments will increasingly be in joint units and we shall need to harmonize conditions of employment while retaining individual Service identity and ethos, and recognizing environmental differences. Considering these challenges, the unique demands placed on our Service Personnel and demographic pressures on recruitment, it is important that we pay attention to the 'deal' we offer to our Service Personnel.

It is inevitable that this will mean change. Adapting to the changing

strategic environment will require difficult choices to be made. We must give our servicemen and women the tools to do the jobs we ask of them. That will mean tough choices. It would be quite wrong for us to retain systems, within a finite budget, which we know are no longer effective.

The Armed Forces will, as ever, adapt well to these changes. Contrary to popular belief, the military has always been excellent at change – it has had to be. One of the great strengths of the three services is their ability to embrace the future at the same time as respecting the past.

I have read some reports in the press of late, which were either wilfully misleading, or written by journalists with no real grasp of military matters. I feel very strongly that it is irresponsible of the media to use essential changes in our systems and structures to create sensational stories, which alarm our servicemen and women and only serve to confuse our public.

Therefore, I want to send a crystal clear message: the changes we have started and will continue to make to our Armed Forces are fully supported by senior officers. They have not been forced upon us by politicians or accountants. We must be careful, of course, and we must ensure there is no change for the sake of change – but this White Paper is about building twenty-first century armed forces. I cannot be more clear, and I hope certain people will remember this in the coming weeks.

Changes in the Armed Forces

I shall try to outline some of these changes to you now. Clearly the size and shape of each of the services will

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need to evolve to optimize joint operations and provide greater flexibility and capability to project power.

Our emphasis in the maritime environment is increasingly on delivering effect from the sea onto the land, supporting forces ashore and on securing access to the theatre of operation. The new amphibious ships coming into service over the next two years, together with the existing smaller aircraft carriers, offer a versatile capability for projecting land and air power ashore. The introduction of the two new aircraft carriers with the Joint Combat Aircraft early in the next decade will offer a step increase in our ability to project air power from the sea. The Type 45 destroyer will enhance protection of joint and maritime forces and assist force projection. Some of our older vessels contribute less well to the pattern of operations that we envisage, and some adjustments will be necessary.

The current mix of heavy and light capabilities is increasingly outdated. We need to move to a better-balanced structure of light, medium and heavy forces together with a greater emphasis on enabling capabilities such as logistics, engineers and intelligence. The Future Rapid Effects System family of vehicles will provide much-needed medium weight capability. Over time this will inevitably reduce our requirement for heavy armoured fighting vehicles and heavy artillery.

There remains an ongoing requirement for heavier armoured forces; the attributes and advantages of which were demonstrated in the conflict in Iraq. Heavy forces will continue to be held for operations where the greater protection and

combat power offered by Challenger 2, Warrior and AS 90 is required.

In the air the emphasis will be on offensive effect. Stormshadow missiles will provide an air launched long-range stand-off precision strike capability while 'smart' bombs such as Paveway IV ensure a high degree of accuracy in our offensive operations. Additionally, Typhoon and the addition of the Joint Combat Aircraft will offer much greater flexibility and balance in the air component of the future, reducing the need for single-role fast jets. Multi-role capability, linked with our new NEC capabilities, will often also allow us to deploy fewer aircraft and yet achieve the same effects.

Creating rapidly deployable units will achieve little without good strategic lift and we need sufficient sea and air transport with the capacity to lift over-size loads. The core of this capability will continue to centre on the C130 fleet, and the A400M when the latter replaces older C130s from 2011. We have already announced that we intend to retain a small force of C-17s after A400M enters service, in order to carry the largest air deployable items.

Our fleet of six Roll-on/Roll-off vessels are now in-service, proved their considerable worth in moving our forces to the Gulf and are crucial to achieving a rapid build up for medium scale operations. Entering service next year will be the first of four new Landing Ship Docks. Each new ship will be capable of deploying twice the quantity of vehicles and stores of their predecessors. For larger, more deliberate operations we will continue to charter both air and sea lift to augment this core capability.

Conclusion

As the Secretary of State said recently, the greatest risk to our peace and security is that the strategic environment will change faster than we can understand or adapt to it. Our response will be based around flexible and agile Armed Forces that are structured and equipped for more frequent operations, conducted at much higher tempo and at shorter notice. The range of tasks they will have to perform will be broad – from peacekeeping, humanitarian and confidence-building operations through to counter-terrorism and high-intensity combat against a diverse set of potential adversaries.

The UK's alliances will be equally broad, and whilst interoperating with the US will be a major focus of effort, that will not be enough on its own. We will continue to improve our capability to operate with NATO and European allies and encourage the development of expeditionary and crisis management capabilities in order that both organizations play complementary and effective roles in the changing world.

To draw to a close, I would highlight the need to build flexibility into our planning. Flexibility of people, policy, structures and equipment, supported by streamlined business processes. We can no longer expect to predict the future environment by simply projecting the current situation and we must be ready to question accepted wisdom and conventional thinking. This will not be easy and will require tough choices but that cannot be avoided if we are to invest and structure our Armed Forces to meet the demands of tomorrow's security environment. ■