

Annual Chief of the Defence Staff Lecture 2017

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I will do my best tonight to cover the activities and issues that attend both the UK Armed Forces and our allies. I think we have got much to celebrate in terms of the success achieved in 2017.

I will start, perhaps surprisingly to one or two of you, with the standing tasks that the UK Armed Forces undertake but get little publicity. This year we have Continuous At-Sea Deterrence for the forty-seventh year, when I know that many of you will be concerned, like me, about the gravity of the nuclear issues that attend both the North Korean problem and what might happen in 2018. So I do not have to emphasise to this audience the importance of Continuous At-Sea Deterrence.

In addition, we have conducted maritime security and support to the National Crime Agency, UK Coast Guard, all of our infrastructure around the UK and the UK Border Force and fishery protection. So what? Maritime security is now an important task as part of national resilience and maritime counter-terrorism.

In the UK airspace you may be surprised just how often Russian long-range aviation visits us and we deter that with the Typhoon on Quick Reaction Alert and we do exactly the same in defence of our Overseas Territories.

We have delivered homeland security, with both conventional and special forces configured for that work. Twice in 2017 – once in May as a result of the Manchester attack and once in September – we have placed with care our troops onto the streets of the UK. That is a really important message; that we can do this in support of the Government and in support of the Police, with Police primacy, providing trained soldiers, sailors and airmen offering support, especially for Critical National Infrastructure.

I have started with this because the importance of the UK Armed Forces, as part of the framework of homeland security is important for both the National Security Capability Review and the future. I hope you find our support for that task reassuring.

On deployment, our forces both regular and reserve have really leant-in and been a leading part of the attempt to collapse the Caliphate in the Middle East and reduce, destroy and remove the threat of the Jihadis of Daesh, including UK citizens who by travelling to participate in terrorist activities make themselves legitimate targets.

The UK continues to play a leading role in countering Daesh. We have done it at sea in the Persian Gulf and southern Red Sea through patrol and surveillance and, where necessary and authorised, also interdiction. We have trained over 60,000 members of the Iraqi Security Forces as part of a coalition, to enable them to take back control of their own country. The fighting in and around Mosul this year has probably been similar to Stalingrad for its intensity in a large city.

The mission to support the Iraqi Security Forces will continue and the Royal Air Force has now flown over 2,900 combat missions and I would highlight Tornado and Typhoon which have conducted the strikes, but I would also point out that they are supported by Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance, manned and unmanned, transport, tanker and helicopter aircraft, and these are all combat missions. Behind the scenes and rarely mentioned the Joint Forces Command controls and conducts the support for those operations through intelligence, through connecting our forces and through cyber operations.

This is a coalition of sixty-nine countries and it is clear the UK plays a leading role and, as acknowledged by the Secretary General of NATO Jen Stoltenberg – who I congratulate on his extension in post – we have played a

significant and leading role in NATO this year and that is the organisation that keeps the people of this country safe by delivering collective security.

My contention is that such statements need to be more prominent in the narrative and dialogue; we are kept safe from many threats and risks by membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and we, therefore, contribute to that organisation. In response to the threats posed by the modernisation of the Russian navy, both nuclear and conventional submarines and ships, we along with our allies have prioritised missions and tasks to protect the Sea Lines of Communication.

This sounds like a rerun of old missions but actually it is very, very important and we should understand how important that mission is to NATO because Russia, in addition to new ships and submarines, continues to perfect both unconventional capabilities and information warfare. There is a new risk to our way of life that is the vulnerability of the cables that crisscross the seabed.

Can you imagine a scenario where those cables are cut or disrupted, which would immediately and potentially catastrophically affect both our media and economy, as well as other ways of living? Therefore, we must continue to develop our maritime forces, working very closely with our allies, to match and understand Russian fleet modernisation.

On land, the Russians have conducted a number of large-scale manoeuvres this year, including a very large-scale exercise called *Zapad* this autumn. They continue to modernise their doctrine, learn lessons from operations in Ukraine and Syria, and apply those lessons in operations facing NATO. In Ukraine, during the conflict, two brigades of the Ukrainian armed forces were wiped out in a few minutes by Russian modernised land-based systems, and these were not necessarily operated by regular forces.

In response, the UK, along with friends and leading NATO allies – particularly the US, Germany, and Canada – are leading the Enhanced Forward Presence mission in Estonia with a UK armoured battlegroup. I visited and many other people have visited and I reassure you we will continue with this mission; it is impressive, the speed of response of the Alliance, with our friends in the US, Germany and Canada leading a Forward Presence Mission in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

In the air, the UK Typhoons, in addition to the intercepts around our shores that I have mentioned, have also led for the first time a detachment to the Black Sea coast – which I also visited – in order to provide air policing and, if necessary, air defence around the Black Sea. Flexibly the Typhoons have also supported the battlegroup in Estonia.

I am trying to give you a lot of detail to point out that we are genuinely playing a leading role in NATO, which is essential to our security and we must sustain this posture as Russia modernises its forces and flexes its muscles, not just in Syria, and has a higher risk appetite to achieve its national interests.

Therefore, I think – and I am in touch with many people who study Russia – that we need new and different thinking on where we train, in-sight of Russia to demonstrate modern deterrence, or with our friends in the Middle East to provide reassurance. An excellent example is our forthcoming large-scale deployment to Oman for Exercise *Saif Sareea III* in the autumn 2018. To our friends we are not ‘fair weather friends’, we stay the course and that is an important message.

Another growing way in which Western military technology is being threatened is by Anti-Access Area Denial, which is not a jargon term but means integrated and lethal, layer-upon-layer air defences. This means we need to think very carefully about how we deploy and our ways of logistic support; some of those may encourage us to think differently about the way we used to do things.

Some people have spoken about a ‘military Schengen’ and I do not like that term but we certainly need to know how to deploy our equipment through the tunnel and across Europe, or have a real, serious discussion between allies about prepositioning equipment. We do not need to go everywhere by air or ship and I would be delighted, if it happens, to re-welcome what we used to have in Germany twenty-five years ago, the railway squadron of the Royal Logistic Corps. [Aside] That will probably be the only thing reported now.

Across the Alliance we see competition and sometimes confrontation with Russia, which requires sustained presence, vigilant deterrence and, I would argue, the creative use of our force structures with like-minded allies. I will give you an example. In northern Europe the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force is now a real thing, with our northern European friends and allies, and we are continuing with our lean headquarters at Northwood to take our friendship to new levels, with collective doctrine, training and understanding, exercises and equipment collaboration. It is a good example of the UK leading in Europe as well as in NATO and I am delighted that Sweden and Finland chose to join the group this year.

However, more than defending our homeland and delivering security, the UK Armed Forces provide contingent response and increasing support to the United Nations, which does not get much notice. Both recent Prime Ministers have told the General Assembly that we will step-up to the UN peacekeeping challenge in order to honour our P5 obligation and we have done so. The UK Forces make a real difference to the people of South Sudan with a deployed field hospital and the Royal Engineers included in all sorts of missions and tasks.

In Somalia we are doing Command and Control and staff support. In Cyprus we continue to find new ways to make the mission more efficient. I and many other senior officers, including my deputy who was at a recent conference, are committed to help the UN to reform its process, deliver better Command and Control, logistics, and intelligence because UN peacekeepers are sadly not immune to attack in this world.

We also show responsibility beyond the P5 and I am now going to mention the European Union; we continue to contribute eighteen per cent to EU missions and as Brexit becomes a reality we remain committed to European security, capability development and future plans. What I do not know yet is how we will do that, but my analogy would be to keep the door open to contribute, in our national interest, to a new way of cooperation with our friends and partners.

Last year I said something about military-to-military links and I would argue this year, after some experience as Chief of the Defence Staff, that during times of political turbulence military links can be very important, load-bearing, and often work on a number of levels. We can deliver unity of effort through conversations and in strategy we may call it ‘international by design’ but in practice this is about developing inter-personal relationships which can help to generate mutual support and sustain unity of effort that is absolutely critical to success in military operations.

Our contingent forces respond to the unexpected and this can take many forms; this year I will focus on our response to the unprecedented hurricane tragedy in the Caribbean. Contrary to initial reports we had prepositioned a specialised ship with skilled people and equipment, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary *Mounts Bay*, a very specialist ship. She remains in the region and her response was magnificent.

The civil servants in the crew of the RFA – who I do not think qualify as ‘mandarins’ or ‘pen pushers’ – [were joined by] the soldiers of the Royal Engineers, the sailors and the Royal Marines, supplanted by an extremely rapid response by the Royal Air Force, with air transport planes and helicopters. A few days after the hurricane it became our largest deployment and a few weeks after that it was finished as we handed it over to the civil authorities, as we should.

My thesis, which is not sophisticated, is asking if the UK Armed Forces receive sufficient recognition for what we do. We receive high-level recognition when the Queen names the ship named after her and when we are visible in the public eye, or in support of extreme weather situations, but not many people realise just how

much support the UK Armed Forces give to our intelligence agencies, our embassies, overseas development efforts, the quiet but reliable support of defence scientists to the police, forensic and explosives experts to many of our communities.

It is a long list and to 'lift the blanket' a little, we have over 1,000 people deployed in direct support of the intelligence agencies and we spend almost £1 billion a year in direct support of them; as we invest more in cyber this will grow. My simple thesis is that we do a lot for our country.

I will not predict what will happen in 2018 but I do know that most of those things I have described will continue and we will also face some new challenges. We have a National Security Strategy from as recently as 2015 and it is under review, a process that we continue to support, but I would remind the audience that strategies are handrails but have to be modified by real-world experience. We have policies and plans and continue to refine those across government, and we continue to contribute to the wider government agenda on prosperity.

The key word for me, why I strongly support the National Security Capability Review, is to adapt to new risks and opportunities. The threats we identified in the NSS continue to proliferate and the frequency of information warfare – in all its manifestations, including fake news and cyber attacks – is now becoming better known.

The complexity that bedevils state-on-state relations and international relations is also relatively well-known, although just how complicated things are in the Middle East perhaps not. And the mendacity of the challenges we face, from North Korean proliferation to the examples I have given about Russia, would suggest to me that it is simply true that we must adapt and not with nostalgia and sentimentalism, therefore we must modernise.

As directed by the Prime Minister and parliament we are modernising the nuclear deterrent with the new Dreadnought class of submarines and continue to evolve the Astute class of submarines, deliver the Type 26, and the Type 31 Ocean Patrol Vessels. Last week, as you all know, the Queen commissioned the aircraft carrier named after her. She will provide a very important deterrent capability with poise, presence and effect, with the Lightning II aircraft, helicopters and support ships. This, I would argue, takes us to a new level of maritime capability, interoperable with our allies.

We need to adapt our doctrine. The very good leader of the Doctrine Centre is here tonight and I know he would agree with me that we must continue to adapt to new threats, including amphibiousness and many other things I have not had time to mention.

There has been much speculation on the future of the Royal Marines and their specialist shipping. Let me be clear that the fighting prowess of the Royal Marines is and will remain world class. We are recognised as one of the few NATO nations which can deliver amphibious effect. Where, how and when will evolve to meet the threats I have described, but I can be clear tonight that reductions to the Royal Marines and the ships that are required to support them remains speculation.

We have to think about the threat. I have mentioned Anti-Access Aerial Denial and many of the specialists here tonight will know this, but there are many advanced Surface-to-Air Missiles in Syria and there is now real Electronic Warfare being conducted in and around Syria. There are ground-launched anti-ship missiles all over the region and the risks posed by unmanned small boats packed with explosives is not a theory or movie story, it is a reality.

Therefore, we need to innovate and I worry, having previously spoken from this platform on innovation, that too often we descend into process. Innovation should not be a process or a slogan, it is the way we respond to the new threat environment. We need now to take big bets on what might work, to both update our existing equipment and deliver new equipment, and this needs to be done in months and not years.

This challenges existing structures, processes and one or two people in this room to be more creative, take more risk and focus on output. If we do not change with the threats we face we risk becoming overmatched and this is the main effort for our Chief Scientific Adviser, our science labs and where appropriate working with allies, for faster modifications, sometimes taking risk on test and evaluation, and developing capabilities by demonstrations and experimentation. We have to do this.

We also have to leverage and understand our friends. I talked about the Joint Expeditionary Force and this is not a one-way relationship. Yes, it is UK-led but we are learning a lot from our friends as we develop this force. So my second thought about this is that we need to be much, much less bespoke when it comes to equipment. We do not have a monopoly on making the best equipment and we need to be very guarded and careful about simply seeking higher specifications.

We have already developed responses to information operations, cyber, psychological operations – I commend the work of the Army's 77 Brigade – and will continue to do so with our partners in the intelligence agencies. But this can also challenge traditional norms. I think we need to take more risk and be creative with both reserves and contractors to develop a true Total Force for cyber.

This should be exciting work, but it is not just the force structure that needs to adapt to the threats we face, it is also our major partners and suppliers because 'bespoking' costs a lot and we have to increase both the availability of equipment and reduce running costs. We look for innovation with our partners and we look for it soon.

Which brings me to affordability, as I know if I said nothing about affordability I would just be questioned about it in the time available for questions. The facts are clear, the pound has fallen in value, the cost of some of our complex equipment has risen, and we need to give our people appropriate remuneration. Therefore, we have to deliver efficiencies, reduce overlap between the services, reduce non-frontline functions, and be more creative with the Whole Force.

The Whole Force, to me, really matters. It is Regulars; Regular Reservists called-out under appropriate conditions; Volunteer Reserves, 'twice the citizen' as Winston Churchill reminded us; and Sponsored Reserves in industry, a fantastic example being the Sponsored Reserves from a company who drive our tank transporters and have kept a large fleet of tank transporters that has been a strategic contribution to the NATO alliance this year. We also have Sponsored Reserves who service our airplanes and deploy with our squadrons; and our civil servants; and our contractors. That is what I mean by the Total Force.

We have now introduced, through secondary legislation, Flexible Engagement, which matches what our young people tell us they want, more flexible careers. These terms are not just financially driven, this is the structure I believe we need to respond to the future.

I may be one of the first CDS to do this, but tonight I want to make a particular plea for civil servants in the Ministry of Defence. They are not 'mandarins' or 'pen pushers', as I said earlier, but they deliver capability. The crews of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, the scientists who invent the counters to Improvised Explosive Devices that save countless lives, not just of UK soldiers but many of our allies and friends. Also, the special advisers and political advisers out in all our theatres of operations and, yes, the people who look after the money; these are also very much part of our capability in the Total Force.

That is what I mean when I say we need to address the affordability challenge by being more efficient in order to be more effective. We need to adapt, I have made that clear, but we also need to take some risk on new and proven in industry technology. We are not at the forefront of adopting Artificial Intelligence or 'algorithmic warfare', but we need to be because that is the way of becoming not just more efficient but more effective.

As I look back at the year we have just remembered and the battles of one hundred years ago, I am struck by just how much innovation there was a hundred years ago. When you read the detail of the Battle of Cambrai, which was one hundred years ago a couple of weeks ago, it was very much about innovation on the battlefield and achieved a remarkable effect.

Look at the way medicine developed during the war between 1914 and 1918. Look at the way in which air power developed in the First World War. I know we will recall and remember one hundred years of the Royal Air Force next year, but you just have to look at the power of air power to change outcomes in 1918, compared to the flimsy experience of 1914.

Of course, this year we have also commemorated seventy-five years since ‘the end of the beginning’ at El Alamein, a very moving ceremony. There again was a battle that was riddled with innovation and new tactics, like the Long-Range Desert Group. So, there is nothing new in modernising the existing force structure; we may not face the threat of invasion as we did in 1940 but we do face a serious threat and risk picture.

So, I do think that we need to think, with our friends and allies from around the world, about how we need to adapt to the future. I would also point out, as I do travel a lot, just how good the UK Armed Forces are at international work, coalitions and alliances, building and influencing around the world; it is something at which we are particularly good.

For me ‘Global Britain’ is not just a slogan invented post-Brexit, but a way of thinking and a way of operating. My first operational deployments in the 1970s were to the Middle East, Africa, Hong Kong, and Belize. We do not deploy to Hong Kong any more – under circumstances everyone understands – but all the other places we still do.

I have grown-up over forty years of service with a sense of our place in the world. We are trying to respond all the time to that sense of duty, service and adventure, coupled with a sense of history and our place in the world. But we need to make sure that the attractiveness of our offer keeps pace with society. We need to pay well enough, remunerate for discomfort or difficult service and, above all, offer something exciting for young people.

We offer more apprenticeships in the Ministry of Defence than any other organisation in Britain, creating skills that go back into the economy when people leave, as well as a sense of discipline and purpose, something every employer tells me. We are an engine for social mobility. I am very proud of my working-class routes and I have flourished in a meritocracy created by a visionary, Lord Trenchard, who was committed to social mobility, as my own service has now been for almost one hundred years.

Many of those in the room who are reservists, or have been reservists, know that when we fuse regulars and reservists together the Total Force is better and that is what has secured victory in the past, so that is what we need to do in the future. Of course, we must be diverse and inclusive to reflect the society we serve and lead the way in creating community opportunities for women and all ethnic groups because we are an all-volunteer force.

Above all, it has got to be fun. When I visit our forces on operations I am always struck by their sense of mission, purpose and duty, but also their humour, wherever they are. They may be tribal and they may fight each other ‘to the death’ on the sports pitch, but when it matters they look out for each other, for their mates.

I have now served as a Joint officer for seventeen years and I know what that means; pride in one’s service but, actually, victories are delivered by the work of a team. So we need to evolve and, as I said last year, we are not all heroes but we are not all victims. The absolute majority of people who volunteer for the UK Armed Forces return to society enriched, not broken, by the experience.

We have worked hard over the past year to understand mental health challenges for those who have served; we have launched the covenant through the great work of Prince Harry and we have particularly focused on PTSD. But it is wrong to support a perception that we are a community damaged by what we do.

When people are injured Defence Medicine offers the most comprehensive rehabilitation in the United Kingdom. We are immensely indebted to the exceptional generosity of the late Duke of Westminster and our new facility is taking place near Loughborough. When it opens next year it will be the finest centre for rehabilitation of armed forces in the world and we hope will show the way to the nation the importance of rehabilitation for all.

But there are still people who need the help of the service charities and we are now working much closer together with the service charities and, as LIBOR funding reduces, we need to understand how to integrate care, how to work with the charity sector, and work out how to deliver specialised services. We are grateful to many of you who support those causes.

Inevitably, at the end of the year, we reflect on the year that has gone. I will be visiting many of our forces over Christmas and also video conferencing with many others, and I know they will be in good heart and good spirit, and have high morale on deployment.

So, we truly are modernising across the piece, but I think I have made clear that we do face change and this requires us to think differently to the past. What we need is a joint, integrated force with fighting power which is interoperable, as a Total Force with adaptive structures and we need to work together on that.

My personal main effort is to sustain our edge in this trouble world; our equipment has to be good enough; our training exercises need to be creative and imaginative; simulation and wargaming need to be higher priorities; we must not generate risk by reducing training, but increase training in order to reduce risk. We need to really understand that people's skills evolve during their career and some people will go in and out of service, regular to reserve and industry, and back again. I have been told time and again, often in this room, that this was too hard, that you could not move your pension pot, or this and that, but that is all wrong, we *can* do this – the Total Force can and will work.

We need to make the case for betterment, from an efficient force structure with reduced overheads, ending up – as I move onto NATO – with a force that 'gets' the world we are in, understands what they are doing, faces down risks and threats, is proud to serve, and remains respected across the globe.

Thank you.