Good afternoon. It really is a delight to be here and to see so many people here for the annual Gallipoli Memorial lecture. It is always tricky doing this kind of talk, because many of the real experts on Gallipoli are in the audience. And I hope you will not mind that I offer a contemporary perspective, rather than too much of a historical analysis. My main focus is on what Gallipoli teaches us about how we might use the military instrument to best effectiveness. And I think Gallipoli is a useful example, in part because of its starkness.

My core thesis is that the modern use of the military instrument is changing. At the very least, it needs to adapt better to what politicians of today are demanding. And that also leads me on to suggest ways in which the military instrument might be more effective. I will tend to look at this through a naval lens, but it absolutely applies pan-Defence. And in some ways I am advocating a return to our very early maritime roots. But I will start by suggesting some of the problem and how that manifested itself at Gallipoli.

There are some that think that the Armed Forces sit in a big red box labelled “Break glass in case of emergency.” That we are just for wars, crises and disasters… That makes us into a sort of rather expensive insurance policy, something that a nation has to pay for but would really rather not. And to some extent, that’s the model that we have adhered to. I am less sure that this is as relevant today, and I will talk more about that as we move through. But this “break glass” model was very much in evidence at Gallipoli.

In 1915, the Royal Navy’s role in the war had been relatively minimal. Churchill, as the First Lord of the Admiralty, was uncomfortable with this. He had already committed thousands of sailors of the Royal Naval Division to fighting in Antwerp rather than let them be seen to be underemployed. That was a futile mission that saw over 40% of them killed, captured or interned. But Churchill stood by his decision - at least they had been used.

But his concerns over the Navy’s apparent underuse had not gone away. The war was still largely about the Army. In the North Sea, the Grand Fleet was occupied on a blockade to keep the German High Seas Fleet from sailing. In the Channel, Naval ships were mainly supporting land action in France and Belgium. In the Atlantic, the Navy was protecting merchant ships from German attack. But really, nothing naval of note was happening. And so Churchill wanted to use the Navy. Fisher wanted to use the Navy. They wanted to create the emergency that would allow them to break the glass. And in doing so, they made an error in how they used the military instrument.

One of the hopes of the Gallipoli campaign was that a successful attack on the Dardanelles would persuade the Balkan states to join the war effort. The military instrument was being used for very clear political ends. That is entirely appropriate, but it is only entirely effective if the military is aligned with the other levers of power, across the other aspects of the campaign. And it was not. The attacking forces were underpowered, undersupported, and going against an enemy they had underestimated. Ends, ways and means were all misaligned.
The results speak for themselves. Although almost all the landings were successful – albeit at a high cost – the result was trenchlock. The attacking forces were stuck, unable to advance. The campaign was a failure.

So why did the use of the military instrument go so badly wrong? I would offer three failures of understanding.

Firstly, there was a failure to understand what the military can do. In 1915, the Navy’s work in the North Sea, Channel and Atlantic was neither glamorous nor dramatic. Keeping the High Seas Fleet in port. Protecting shipping, and later organising and escorting convoys was effective, but it wasn’t particularly glamorous. It was stopping replenishments from reaching Germany, while ensuring Allied supply lanes stayed open. But surely the Royal Navy is about glorious and decisive sea battles, not this humdrum routine work? And yet, the irony here is that it was this effort, not the brave and bloody battles at Gallipoli, or at Jutland or at Dogger Bank, that were really the Navy’s greatest contribution to bringing the war to a close.

Secondly, there was a failure of cultural understanding. In 1915, British planners did not understand the Ottoman Empire’s abilities. There was an almost racist assumption that the defending forces would lack skill, grit and determination. In the event, they fought with sophistication, bravery and persistence.

And thirdly, there was a failure of technological understanding. The troops were using 19th century tactics against 20th century weapons. Just like on the Western Front, the ground forces could not advance in the face of these. The military instrument had been used possibly for the wrong reasons, definitely in the wrong way, and at least partially with the wrong tools.

There are two reasons why I think these lessons are particularly pertinent today:

Firstly, I think that sophisticated liberal market economies demand very clear returns on investment. The large sums of capital investment that modern militaries require means that they need to be used more than just in case of an emergency. Some might view that as foolhardy. But to me, the insurance premium argument is much more ineffective than it used to be.

And secondly, we have had difficult recent wars where the normal lenses of “winners” and “losers” are much harder to identify. This understandably means for our politicians that using the military instrument might appear much more loaded. We need to respond to that caution and demonstrate how we really can be effective in pursuing their aims.

If I turn to the specifics of the maritime as an example. Navies have always been inextricably linked with trade and prosperity. A nation’s geographical relationship with the sea is always important. America, I would offer, has abundant natural resources, access to two oceans, and big, wide, navigable rivers – and hence, that explains in part, why it now has such pre-eminence in the world.
I am not going to go over the well-trodden ground of Britain being an island nation, with navigable rivers, natural harbours and abundant trees for ship building. But Britain’s relationship with the sea is deep, strong and enduring. And as we went out into the world by sea, our ability to profit from trade became dependent on our ability to protect that trade. The sea was a large, lonely, lawless place. And so having a Royal Navy that could ensure the safety of shipping, that could patrol key trade routes and that could project British power and influence around the world became vital. Britain’s success was built on that of the Royal Navy.

Now, I have already mentioned that the Royal Navy’s biggest contribution in the First World War really involved trade. Stopping trade reaching Germany. Ensuring the safety of trade coming to the Allies. This, as much as the slow strain of attrition in the land campaign, was part of the reason why we were the winners in that war.

And that brings me back to my Gallipoli examples. Now, as then, we come back to three sorts of understanding: the military; the cultural; and the technological.

Firstly, we need to promote a greater understanding of the military instrument of power. This needs to be cross Whitehall. It needs to be across society. We need to reassure and help our politicians about the choices that we can offer. And we need to show better the impact that hard power can have as well as the tools that we can provide in a soft power way. Over a hundred years after Gallipoli, the world looks very different. The First World War was a terrible, protracted and bloody conflict, but it was relatively clear cut in terms of winners and losers. We knew who we were fighting, where, and why. Today, the world is no longer as straightforward.

As the nature of conflict becomes increasingly uncertain, as threats become increasingly undefined, the break glass model is increasingly untrue. And that is especially so in an era of constant competition. We all have a vital role every day, around the world, and particularly, I would argue, for navies. Whether that is demonstrating freedom of navigation, or ensuring the safe passage of trade, or simply the very powerful geostrategic impact that comes from putting a grey warship twelve miles off someone’s coastline.

But excellence in military equipment, training and personnel is not cheap, and can’t be developed overnight. In an era when resources are tight across government, politicians have a right to expect a return on their investment. The military instrument can prevent wars, not just win them. And the military instrument can definitely further government policy when nested with the other instruments of power. And navies, I think, amplify this more than most.

Navies are things that you use every day, in peace and war, at home and abroad, on, under and above the water. In today’s world of constant competition, we can deliver constant presence, and that makes sound economic as well as strategic sense.

Secondly, we need to promote a far greater cultural understanding of the world we operate in. That goes hand in hand with understanding the impact of the military instrument. I am reminded of Kennan’s Long Telegram, which drove the strategy for much of the Cold War. It began with a strategic cultural analysis of
Russia, then built on that to discuss how political, diplomatic and information elements dovetailed with the military.

It seems to me that we too often view other nations through our own cultural lens. This proved disastrous in Gallipoli. We must not allow it to prove disastrous again.

And thirdly, we need to promote greater technological understanding. Failure at Gallipoli stemmed in part from using 19th century tactics against 20th century weapons. All of today's Chiefs, we are determined that we will not fall into the trap of using 20th century tactics against 21st century weapons and opponents. But I would not pretend that we lead organisations that find technological advancement easy or that we have all the processes that enable us to embrace technological change quickly. In an era of technological revolution, that is potentially a major issue.

And cyber and information warfare continue to develop, their use will become increasingly important. Information warfare has moved from the hands of specialists to the smartphone in everyone's pocket. And so information becomes its own battleground, and one that is shifting, unstable and unpredictable.

Are we adapting fast enough? Do we understand these new tools well enough? And can we work with these tools closely enough?... These are questions that we are all considering at the moment.

Today, we live in a world that is changing rapidly, and we need to change with it. I don't want to dwell on the reasons why because I am sure that you are familiar with all of them, but I will just touch on them:

Our adversaries are exploiting the speed of technological change. And we need to embrace, match and utilise that pace of change. The risk of state-on-state conflict is increasing, where sub threshold and grey zone activity is becoming the norm. The global economy is increasingly shifting towards the east.

Brexit is another obvious strategic change. And one where we need to support the government and play our role in highlighting that we are not withdrawing from the world stage: in fact quite the opposite. And for all of us in Defence, we are a part of Global Defence, supporting Global Britain, with a Global Navy.

So as the 21st century progresses, our ability to use the military element together with the other levers of power will prove critical. As the UK increasingly turns outwards around the world, we must ensure that we continue to uphold this. But there are other levers as well as the economic. The military instrument is a powerful tool to back up diplomatic efforts, both with soft power influence and hard power coercion. These are well trodden paths.

But I will close on a note of optimism. One of the reasons I am so pleased to be here is that I firmly believe that we can learn lessons from our past. While Gallipoli may have gone badly wrong, the lessons that we learnt from it were not wasted. When the Allied powers faced a far bigger amphibious challenge nearly 30 years later, the failures of Gallipoli were translated into success on the beaches of Normandy. We have the ability to learn.
At this time of year in particular we remember those from all nations who fought and died in the service of their country. And we owe it to all of them to make sure that the lessons from Gallipoli are not forgotten.

Thank you.