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The New British Way in Warfare

By General Sir Charles Guthrie GCB LVO OBE ADC Gen

The Chief of Defence Staff

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I would like to thank Sir Frank for his kind introduction. I am indeed due to retire in three days and at some forty-four years it has been a long career. In fact if Liddell Hart, never a fan of 'old' generals, had had his way I would have been forced to retire two years ago because a reduction in the retiring age from 67 to 60 for lieutenant generals and above was one of his suggested reforms. I have called my lecture 'The New British Way in Warfare', but this is not a case of 'new Labour, new language'. I could equally have called it the 'New Model Armed Forces' but then this would have been the Cromwell lecture not the Liddell Hart lecture.

Tonight I don't want to look backwards over what has been an interesting and varied time as a soldier and as some may have heard me say at the RUSI, I do not want to fall into the trap of writing my own obituary. What I do want to do and I trust what you want me to do, is to talk about the British Armed Forces of today. To look at their prospects and aspirations for the future, and perhaps along the way to chance an opinion as to what Basil Liddell Hart might have felt about the New British Way in Warfare.

Because it is new you know. Or at least it is new in comparison to the static military situation that has pertained in Europe since the end of the Second World War. In essence the new way is expeditionary not static. It is, in some senses, a return to a state of affairs which would have been familiar to Liddell Hart. Joint not single Service. Global not merely European. The aspirations and attitudes of society are completely different, and the aspirations of governments have changed quite dramatically in recent years. They see the Armed Forces as world-class contributors that promote and sustain Britain's place in world affairs in a way that complements our industrial and economic standing. All this has come about by evolution, rather than revolution, in the ten years or so since the Cold War ended.

Echoes of the Thirties?

When Liddell Hart published *The British Way in Warfare* in 1932 he was writing at a time of economic depression. At a time when defence spending was at an all time low, and when the official policy was that Britain would not be involved in a major war for at least ten years. We may not be in economic depression today but the other two factors chime rather well with the current situation. Liddell Hart was also writing under the shadow the Great War and the impact that that had had on military thinking and strategy. Today, although the shadow is more lightly cast, we are still occasionally troubled by the legacy of the Cold War, of nuclear deterrence and a Defence policy which was predominantly focussed on Europe. That said it is surprising how well equipment designed for the Hanover Plain, the Iceland Faeroes Gap and the air defence of the United Kingdom stood up to the rigours of the Gulf War and other operations. Importantly, our doctrine has already embraced the major changes required in the new geopolitical world.

In 1932 the battle for resources for the three Services raged in Whitehall. Little has changed in this respect although the Services no longer battle against each other. Some may say we have united against the common enemy – Her Majesty's Treasury. From what I have seen from my travels around the world all Defence Ministries have to battle against their Treasuries. I do think the way the Forces used to fight for funding internally was counter productive and thankfully is a thing of the past. Take for example the carrier debate which raged during the sixties – a period of particular turbulence and uncertainty for defence characterised by budget difficulties and a redefining of the role of the Services. At that time a controversy raged over whether to replace the Royal Navy's carriers or whether the Royal Air Force could handle all maritime air tasks from shore bases around the world. Military opinion was sharply, and for the period predictably, divided along partisan single Service lines. This led to a deplorable state of bad relations and distrust between the two Services such that one Government report commented that the Services should not be fighting each other but 'be working together in trust, harmony and partnership'. Wounds were inflicted by the two Services on each other which took 20 years to heal.

This contrasts starkly with the future carrier debate in the Strategic Defence Review. We had to strike a balance between the needs and aspirations of the Services and the needs and aspirations of defence; we had to prioritise our needs against the strategic backdrop. Would it have been helpful to pitch again the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force against each other? Of course not! I have no doubt the Royal Navy would have wished for a third carrier, but that was not affordable and was quickly discounted. Perhaps the Royal Air Force could have argued strongly against any carriers at all and instead pushed for a larger number of land based offensive aircraft – that also would not have been helpful. What made the difference was that the debate *began* with the First Sea Lord and the Chief of the Air Staff signing up to the 'Joint Vision'. Thirty years on – trust and harmony clearly in evidence and a vital ingredient of the 'New British Way'.

That is not to say that difficult decisions do not have to be made over the balance of investment in one system or another. These are no longer taken on single Service grounds and are looked at in terms of the military capability that will be delivered. Thus in the Defence Review we took the view that in future there should be less emphasis on certain capabilities required principally for the Cold War such as large numbers of tanks, designed to defend ground, defensive fighters and attack submarines and more emphasis on strategic lift, deployable forces, Special Forces, and electronic surveillance. We were striking for the right

balance that would see the British Forces restructured for the future out to about 2015. I note that Liddell Hart in the Thirties was advocating spending less on the Army and more on the Royal Air Force, which he saw as the deterrent force of the future. As a result the Army's share of the overall defence vote in 1934 fell from £40 million to £19 million.

I would like to stay on resources for a moment or two longer. In the inter-war years the percentage of GDP spent on Defence was at an all time low. Until the last spending review the allocation to Defence was once again the lowest it had been since the end of the Second World War, and across the western world this was a common trend. Here in the United Kingdom the Government reversed that trend in a modest way and certainly if there is to be any increase in European Defence capability there is going to need to be a wholesale increase in defence spending, not only in the United Kingdom, but among our European partners as well. The challenge for my successor will be to complete the modernisation and restructuring of the British Forces, as envisaged under the Defence Review, without an increase in funding and with the current level of operational commitments.

And goodness the operational tempo over the last few years has been pretty intense. During my four years as CDS the Forces have been involved in 44 operations in some 20 different countries. From the Falklands to Georgia from Sierra Leone to East Timor our footprint around the globe has been remarkable. The operational dimension of the 'New British Way' is something I will return to in more detail later.

The other element of the strategic context of 1932 – no major war for 10 years – translated then not only into reduced spending on the military but also into an inertia over modernisation and the need to come to terms with, and properly exploit, new technologies such as the tank and the aeroplane. I am pleased to say we do not have that problem today; I hope that Jurassic thinking in the Central Staffs is very definitely a thing of the past and I think Liddell Hart would have been pleased with the way in which we have embraced modern capabilities and technologies.

I do think we have to be cautious, however, about the so-called 'silver bullet'. Warfare is a difficult and dangerous business. Too much has been made of late about standoff precision attack and the relatively light scale of own casualties during operations. Nobody is invulnerable and the sad fact is people do die on operations. Indeed, since 1945 there has been a British Serviceman killed on operations in every year bar one. But technology does bring the ability to apply lethal force with fewer men, and can protect combat forces to a greater degree than in the past. The fewer 'soft skinned men' one has to put in harms way on the battlefield the better. Liddell Hart, seared by the slaughter of Paschendale and the Somme, and as a great exponent of mechanisation and tank warfare, would have approved I am sure.

He would also have been delighted by the way in which Air Power has finally lived up to its early promise. No serious military activity can take place today without a favourable air situation, although we have not arrived at his prediction that the air would be "the sole medium of future warfare". And nor will we. That has been shown time and time again to be wrong headed. While the reach and relative precision of air power, together with its comparative invulnerability when a favourable air situation exists, plays well to the public and political desire to be 'doing something'; the fact remains that air power can only be effective when properly backed up by the decision to escalate and fight on the ground as well.

Air power alone can achieve little and we should be careful about learning false lessons from the Gulf, Bosnia or Kosovo.

Strategic Context

The strategic context in which the British Forces operate today has some similarities with the Thirties but there is one fundamental difference. Today the likelihood of wars of survival between nation states is receding and the potential for regional or sub-regional conflict is increasing. The most dangerous place on earth is no longer the North German plain with a superpower powder keg waiting for the spark. Now it is more likely to be Africa, Kashmir, Indonesia, Korea, Central Asia, the Near East or the Gulf. Paradoxically, the end of the Cold War has spelt the advent of a period of unprecedented expeditionary operations for the British Armed Forces.

But why? First, the depth and breadth of the instability, which had been suppressed during the Cold War, has become apparent. Globalisation has led to a world where activity in Korea reverberates on the economic markets of Europe and America within 24 hours. Global corporations, international communications and the ease of travel have led inexorably to the fusion of the interests of developed nations. Greater access to satellite television, instant reporting and the World Wide Web has led to greater awareness of the gap between the haves and have nots and this in turn has led to a culture of unfulfilled expectations. No wonder that at the same time as globalisation we have fragmentation as nationalistic or religious groups seek to improve their own well-being through greater self-identity. All of this has led to the potential for conflict of the type that has erupted in Indonesia, the Balkans and Africa. The world is an even more uncertain place in 2001 than it has been for years. In the 53 years since the first UN peacekeeping mission, monitoring the cease-fire in the Middle East, until 1990 there were just 15 UN peace support operations. In the 10 years since 1990 there have been 40.

Peacekeepers or War Fighters

Britain's place in the world is determined by her interests as a nation and as a leading member of the international community. The two are inextricably linked because our national interests have a vital international dimension. It follows, therefore, that Britain is keenly interested in maintaining international stability and this has been the primary focus of the British Services who have faced unprecedented levels of operational activity since the Cold War ended. This does not mean that we are focussed on peacekeeping or peacemaking despite our recent experiences in Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor, Sierra Leone and of course our enduring commitment in Northern Ireland. Being a 'force for good' is not about helping little old ladies across the road. It is about maintaining international stability through a willingness to deploy rapidly, anywhere in the world, credible combat forces capable of making a real difference. That requires forces capable of true war fighting at the higher end of the intensity spectrum, and together with the political will to employ that capability effectively.

Capabilities based on war fighting will give us the ability to contribute to other types of operation – the reverse is not true. Peacekeeping can so easily become peace- enforcement. I believe you do not create the conditions for peace by building garrisons behind large protective perimeters, or by patrolling only inside armoured vehicles. Nor is it achieved by manning ineffectual roadblocks and checkpoints in largely friendly territory. You have to go out on the ground, see and meet the people face to face, gain their trust and their respect. I

have seen too many examples in the last couple of years where peacekeeping efforts have faltered through lack of fighting will and credibility.

Thus, to enable those on peace support operations to do their job effectively a war fighting capability is essential. I only have to recall operations in Iraq, Bosnia and Kosovo to demonstrate what I mean. In none of these situations would the opposition have been coerced if we hadn't had the credible force packages to back up our promises. UNPROFOR in Bosnia is a good case study of a scenario where a weak and poorly coordinated peacekeeping force was largely ineffective. It was only when real firepower was deployed with IFOR that the Balkans War Lords started to take notice. I always recall Kofi Annan's words, "you can do a lot with diplomacy but…you can do a lot more with diplomacy backed up with firmness and force".

Of course we must engage in conflict prevention and peace support operations, but we must avoid becoming too focussed on the 'softer' end of the conflict spectrum. We must ensure that peace support does not lead to misemployment of personnel and equipment, and an inability to execute operations toward the high intensity war fighting end of the spectrum when called upon to do so. Too much peacekeeping would undoubtedly blunt our war fighting edge. We also need our Forces to train in the high intensity all arms environment, which will enable them to conduct more effectively the peace support operations of tomorrow. Nobody can afford two sets of forces, one for peacekeeping and the other for war fighting.

Joint Forces

To be effective in the modern strategic context the British Forces have become increasingly Joint in the way in which they conduct operations and therefore training. There is nothing inherently new in joint operations but the traditional distinction between ground, sea and air theatres of operations has been more and more replaced by a single battle-space, embracing all three environments and cyberspace, and encompassing functions as diverse as joint logistics, information warfare and media operations.

The Forces working within their own environments create a combined effect, which is greater than the sum of its parts. Liddell Hart saw this in its early form and recognised the utility of tanks working in close harmony with aircraft. Something Tedder and Montgomery perfected with difficulty during the Desert Campaigns of World War II and which was carried forward to the Air-Land battle concept of the latter stages of the Cold War. Today all three Services work in operational harmony to bring about the collective objective, and to ensure that this remains at the heart of the 'New British Way' we have implemented several measures to reinforce joint operations.

We have set up a Joint Defence Doctrine Centre to develop high-level joint doctrine, coordinate the development of single service doctrine, and provide the British input to Allied and multi-national doctrine. The Centre will give impetus to forward thinking, contribute to the future joint vision and strategic development of our armed forces and thus contribute directly to the cohesion and effectiveness of our forces in joint operations. In the Thirties, Liddell Hart championed a doctrine based on the defensive although at the same time he favoured manoeuvre as the most effective form of land warfare. Today, expeditionary operations are far more likely to involve offensive rather than defensive action, and our high intensity war fighting doctrine is based on the all arms, by which I also mean all Services, manoeuvre battle.

Joint operations require joint command and for the British Forces this is vested in the Chief of Joint Operations who has his headquarters at Northwood. The joint commander must be able to draw upon and direct the entire range of front-line forces committed to the operation, together with supporting units and personnel. Joint teamwork does not just happen. It requires a shared understanding of the roles each participant is required to play. It also needs mutual confidence, built up from extensive practical experience of operating together, so that everyone will deliver his or her contribution effectively.

We have created a number of Joint organisations such as the Joint Force Harrier. Total integration of our current Royal Air Force and Royal Navy fast-jet Harrier aircraft into a single force is impracticable. But closer harmonisation between the existing forces could pave the way towards a truly joint force for the future employing a common aircraft which is likely to be the Joint Strike Fighter. This is not just a case of enabling Royal Air Force aircraft to operate from the Navy's carriers. It is equally about Royal Air Force aircraft operating from shore bases if this makes operational sense. It is a two-way street.

All three Services operate battlefield helicopters in support of forces on the ground. We have created a Joint Helicopter Command which draws on the equipment, personnel and expertise of the single Services and is charged with providing the Joint Force Commander tailored packages of battlefield helicopters (from one or more Service), support equipment and personnel, to meet operational requirements. The Command will provide a single focus for the ready transfer of best practice from Service to Service and for removing, over time, differences in current operating procedures.

Joint cooperation and integration can have benefits throughout defence, in the support area as well as the front line. The joint approach is increasingly at the heart of modern, effective and efficient support. The new joint organisation for defence logistics led by a Chief of Defence Logistics, will strengthen our strategic logistics planning, matching logistics support more effectively to the requirements of joint operations.

I think our approach to joint activities thus far has been right. But this is not a path towards a single Service along the Canadian model. There are many advantages to joint organisation, but I judge that to go further than we have could, certainly at present, be harmful. People, who are our lifeblood, want to join the Naval Service, the Army or the Royal Air Force – not some faceless combined force. All our recruiting evidence points to this. Indeed for the Army, some recruits will only contemplate joining a particular regiment. Ethos, esprit de corps, morale are vitally important to fighting men and we erode this at our peril.

The solution we have adopted creates a pool of Joint Rapid Reaction Forces, bringing together readily available forces from all three Services. From this pool we can draw the right force packages to mount short-notice medium-scale (i.e. brigade size or equivalent) operations of all kinds across the crisis spectrum. We will be able to mount concurrent operations if necessary, or use the pool of forces to make a coherent and balanced early contribution to larger operations, subsequently building up our commitment over time using forces held at lower readiness levels. Today we no longer have the luxury of a slow build up of combat power in the theatre of operations. We have to arrive quickly and in strength. Hopefully our arrival will prevent a crisis from becoming a conflict, but if it doesn't we have to be capable of delivering the first punch.

Expeditionary Forces

The 'New British Way' therefore is about expeditionary operations. Would Liddell Hart have raised his eyebrows? I think not. He was outspoken about *not* sending an expeditionary force to the continent in 1939, but on reflection, his objection then was twofold – first he felt that getting involved on the continent was wrong (and risked a rerun of the Great War) and second that the British Army was ill- equipped and poorly prepared for such a role. If he were commenting on expeditionary operations today, say in Kosovo, or Sierra Leone, I think he would take a different view. He would certainly have approved of our 'indirect approach' in Sierra Leone where we are training the legitimate government's forces to defend their own country against the rebels.

Engagement during these modern expeditionary operations is often limited, of this he would approve, but more important the Forces today are much better equipped for the rigours of expeditionary life than they were. We are not complacent, however, and our equipment programme is structured to deliver more capability for the expeditionary era. What we particularly lack is strategic lift to get forces to the theatre of operations quickly. We have on order four C17 wide body freight aircraft to improve this situation and have committed ourselves to the Airbus A400M project. We have also recently announced a deal to procure six Roll On Roll Off ferries to improve our sealift capability. These enhancements are essential to delivering the mobility elements of the Defence Review and I am delighted that we lead Europe in configuring our forces in this way. Other countries have yet to carry out the kind of fundamental review of their armed forces that the British have done.

Multi-National Forces

Fighting alongside the forces of other nations was not new even in the Great War; Marlborough knew all about it. The history of warfare is a history of coalitions, pacts and alliances. NATO has been the most successful alliance ever and remains the cornerstone of British Defence policy. Nothing we are doing with our European Union partners must be allowed to erode NATO, or our commitment to it. The European Defence debate has been played out in the political arena not the military one. Nobody, in authority in this country, I have spoken to has ever suggested that the pool of forces we have made available to the EU constitutes in any shape or form a European Army. From my perspective as a soldier, the European Defence Initiative is all about improving European Defence capabilities and not about creating more bureaucracies, more generals and more useless headquarters.

We in Europe cannot expect the US to continue to shoulder the lion's share of the collective security burden. The fact is, with roughly similar GDPs, we compare poorly with the US in terms of defence effort. Today in European NATO countries, there are over two million men and women under arms; in the US there are only 1.4 million. From its two million servicemen, Europe found it difficult to provide just 2% for Kosovo. Europe was not able to pull its weight in its own backyard. I can give plenty of other examples of the capability gap between the US and Europe: the US have 60 operational military satellites, the Europeans have 10; the US have 12 aircraft carriers, the Europeans have 6; and the US can field 17 Strategic Airlift Squadrons while the Europeans do not yet have a single wide-bodied transport aircraft between them.

In the UK, defence expenditure in real terms (constant prices) has reduced by nearly 30% over the last 10 years. This is reflected in proportional reductions in the number of service

people and combat capability – frigates and destroyers, combat battalions and fast jet aircraft – all of which stand today at only two third the 1990 level. Of course, the US defence budget has contracted as well, but defence expenditure per capita in the USA is still two and a half times higher than the average in European NATO countries, and the US, with only just over a third of the total population of NATO, provides well over half the defence spending.

There is a case for Europe to be able to undertake some missions, such as Non- combatant Evacuations or Peace Support Operations, on her own when NATO as a whole is not involved. It is inconceivable to me, that if more serious military action were contemplated that NATO wouldn't wish to be involved. But at the same time, for the less intense European only operations, there are European forces such as the Swedes, Finns, Austrians and Irish who have an excellent record in peace support operations and we would want to draw on their capabilities when it is appropriate to do so. But in all this I would expect NATO to be given first refusal – certainly on whether to get involved or not. I find it difficult to envisage the Europeans mounting an operation the US would disapprove of – we have learned the lesson of Suez!

In recent years the British 'Way' has been to fight in alliances and coalitions of the willing or under UN auspices. Our current operations reflect this well with coalitions in the Gulf, NATO led operations in the Balkans and UN led operations elsewhere.

Media Operations

I said earlier that the New British way had evolved and one dimension has evolved faster than the rest and risen to a new prominence in our daily lives. I am of course referring to Media Operations. What would Liddell Hart have made of the treatment defence issues receive in the modern media? He was of course a journalist himself and a very respected one too. Both at *The Telegraph* and *The Times* his view on military matters carried real weight. I do think it is lamentable that there are so few serious defence correspondents around today – perhaps only ten or so in London. I think Liddell Hart would view with some distaste much of the superficial treatment that defence issues receive.

On the one hand, the public is tremendously interested in the military and generally supportive of everything we do. But, the vast majority of our country know very little about the forces. Many of the general public have never met a Serviceman, and even some grandfathers are too young to have done National Service. I think we in the military must do more to help them understand and to get the right messages across. The Chiefs of Staff today have a responsibility to do this and this is a major change that has come about in recent years. When I joined the Army, if you spoke to the press independently you would be punished. Now no commander considers his operational plan without taking into account how the outcome will play in the media. We train our people from the very start in how to talk to the press and I think we are much better at getting our message across. We look actively for opportunities to report positive developments and we are no longer so reluctant to rebut inaccurate or tendentious reporting. We have tried to develop mutual trust and respect. It has not been easy! The Army learned much from the troubles of Northern Ireland, the Navy from the Falklands.

Media handling is now an integral part of military operations. We train our people for it, and commanders are expected to make the most of media opportunities and to get the message across. As we get better at it we are occasionally accused of 'spinning' stories, but generally

speaking I think the military word of a military spokesman, be he senior commander or not, carries considerable weight in the media. They do say our credibility is inversely proportional to our rank! All we are attempting to do is communicate, and to get our story into the media in an accurate and favourable manner. Proactive Media Operations are another integral part of the 'New British Way'.

Personnel Dimension

Media reporting plays directly into the public's perception of the military and in turn has a significant impact on our recruiting. I would like to turn now to the personnel and social dimensions of the modern British Forces.

It is true the Services reflect the society they serve. But I do not believe we need to replicate it in every way. Indeed, one letter to *The Times* I recall from last year suggested that it was time society in general started to emulate the Forces and not the other way around. But we must accept that times have changed and our social policies must move with the times if we are to attract and retain the high calibre of people we require.

Liddell Hart was a great reformer and I am pleased to see that many of the reforms he proposed were directly targeted at improving the lot of junior soldiers. He would have applauded loudly today's emphasis on people and on improving the lot of families. The 'people' aspects of the Defence Review were very welcome but we still have got a long way to go yet. If we want to be serious about recruiting and retaining the right people we have to focus on improving living accommodation, on terms and conditions of Service, on operational welfare facilities, and on generally bringing Service Personnel policies up to date with modern social aspirations. This will all require funding properly or our people, whose aspirations have been raised, will lose faith.

However, as a war tested veteran he would have recognised the perils in going slavishly down the route of political correctness for its own sake. I think he would have agreed that although the rights of the individual are important, there are times in the military when those rights must be subordinated for the collective good. Military life is different. It is not like going to the office or the factory and when life becomes difficult, in the chaos and confusion of combat we need people who will work together effectively as a team – be it ship's company, battalion or squadron – and not just a collection of individuals. One way or another the raft of employment legislation we face today is in danger of breeding a generation averse to taking risks, to making courageous decisions or to operating without the benefit of reams of rules and regulations.

I suspect he would also have spoken out against even the current level of employment of women in the Armed Forces. In 1914 he wrote "My belief in the inferiority of women is more profound than ever". I do not share that viewpoint and would like to see more women join. At present about 8 percent of our total trained strength are women. They fulfil some very important roles and are doing every bit as good a job as their male colleagues. The Navy have 73% of posts open to women, the Army 70 percent and the Royal Air Force 96%. The major areas of exclusion are in cap-badged units of the infantry, Royal Marines and RAF Regiment, the Royal Armoured Corps and submarines. We have taken an incremental approach to widening the roles for women in the Services and are currently conducting a study into their suitability for close combat roles. I am not sure that the nation is ready for such a step yet, but from my perspective we must ensure that nothing, I repeat nothing, damages the combat

effectiveness of the British Armed Forces. The Chiefs of Staff have a duty to recommend to the government how to produce the best operational capability for the nation. We will have to see what conclusions the study draws, but I stress the Chiefs of Staff are not in the business of designing Armed Forces for the good times. We have to advise what will work when the conditions are tough, dangerous and frightening. We are not in the business of designing armed forces only for ceremonial duties or the good times. As I said before we cannot afford two sets of forces. When the time comes, if the Chiefs of Staff advice upsets those who seek equality as an end in itself then so be it.

The New British Way

Some might argue that if the 'New British Way' is essentially joint Service, multi- national and expeditionary in nature then there is not that much entirely 'new' about it. To a degree I would accept that. The Services have always worked closely together and we have always worked in close cooperation with others; the British Empire was founded and secured on expeditionary operations. What is new is the depth and breadth of our joint and multi-national endeavours and the speed with which we can mount expeditionary operations deploying a credible force, with a true war fighting capability in days not months. All three Services work in close harmony to deliver the essential military capability that the government requires and, when necessary, this combined force can work easily and comfortably alongside our closest allies either in the lead or as a vital component of a coalition. This capability has been called on time and time again during my time as Chief of Defence Staff and I see no reason to suspect that the future will be any less busy. The New British Way in Warfare is set to promote this country's interests on the world stage for the next decade and beyond, and I commend it to you.