

Private discussion with Gen Sir Richard Barrons

12th October 2016

Top line: The UK defence model is failing. UK is at real risk.

Why and how the world is changing and why it matters

- Serious economic malaise
- Wartime interest rates
- Growing projection of inequality within and between states
- Population growth, ageing, urbanisation, climate change, resources

Symptoms: terrorism, migration, populism

NB– is this a global strategic change ...or just a bump in the road?

We have led comfortable lives since the end of the cold war. Wars have been away matches on our terms, with resources we have chosen to apply.

Our institutions are now failing to deliver or being bypassed

Our world system is being challenged – by IS, Russia, China esp. China vs. USA

So, the power of initiative and decision is ebbing away from the West and US can no longer protect us

UK

50% of energy and 40% of food is from abroad.

UK has vital interests in having the ability to engage globally, but that engagement will no longer be on our terms alone

In our recent wars, the opposition had no peer capabilities and could pose no military threat to UK. Also, our mixed success has left a bad after taste.

These interventions have also forged our current, very specific, military capabilities and were very costly.

There has been a progressive, systemic demobilisation of NATO military capability and a run down of all its members' defences

Our wars have not required the full mobilisation of the military or any motivation of civilian society. They have given us the impression that we can afford war at 2% GDP as well as all our other national activities. Last time we faced a similarly complex level of threat we were spending 4-5% GDP. To catch up we need £7 billion more just to bring our current force up to effectiveness. Why do we get so little bang for our buck? How to be competitive at an affordable price?

Complex, uncertain, concurrent conflicts across the world provide lots of potential for poor outcomes and strategic shocks. We need to ask “what if lots of these things go wrong?”

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What will happen if the UK population, from fear or outrage, demand intervention?

We are seeing new / reinvented ways of warfare – hybrid, plus the reassertion of hard power in warfare

50% of Syria's 250000 casualties have been caused by Russian artillery and air power.

Russia and China have developed new capabilities specifically to attack our perceived weaknesses eg. airspace superiority. Proliferation of precision conventional missiles.

The DF21D Chinese ICBM is designed to kill aircraft carriers. Russia has submarine capability to cut undersea communication cables. Missiles in shipping containers are now being exported by Russia and these turn any ship into a warship. The separation of weapons and platforms can revolutionise navies. Aircraft Carriers can be useful for lots of things, but not for war v China or Russia, so we should equip them accordingly.

It is very important not to be lulled into a false sense of security. The West no longer has a military edge on Russia. There are challenges to National security and defence we cannot now counter. The UK homeland can now be held at risk at no notice, by Russian cyber and missiles etc for the first time in the past 30 years.

We need a new way ahead. But this is unpalatable, expensive and therefore is being denied.

The current state of UK Defence

Trends since the end of the Cold War.

Defence spending as a % GDP has halved, plus defence cost Inflation of +7% for equipment and 2% for people. Over 25 years, this has produced drastic reductions.

We now have equipment only in token numbers, so UK is incapable of independent action and is also a poor ally.

There has been a profound shift in the general readiness of our Armed Forces so that, today, only a small proportion of our Armed Forces are ready at any one time.

Graduated readiness is supposed to allow us to bring our forces to readiness in a certain length of time. But today, mobilisation stocks no longer exist to bring the Armed Forces up to readiness.

We pay for service personnel to be in uniform but have neither the kit nor plans to bring them all to readiness. We have no reserves, properly understood. We must recognise how much better the military could use reserves. How we did it in WW2 is a good example. Big wars are always won by civilians

If we can organise mobilisation (of people, skills, equipment,) suitable to today's circumstances, make better use of reserves, develop an appropriate acquisition process, pursue robotics more, then we can make do with small standing armed forces as long as we structure them properly.

Defence privatisation can be OK up to a point. But there has been no evaluation as to where it is worthwhile and where not. For it to be sensible, the military need to understand what they need so

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they know what to ask for and if they get it or not at the end of the day. Some Generals or Admirals do know, but the military's middle levels are stodgy, old fashioned, unimaginative.

DE+S is of very mixed quality and the military don't understand contracts or the market. We desperately need upskilling in these areas and we will need to buy in this skill

Lots of the private sector can deliver better service in many of the functions we need. But we need to discuss with them how far into harms way they will be prepared to go.

Our Nuclear programme drains resources from conventional forces and hollows them out. The Nuclear problem is that delivery by monopoly suppliers and overriding safety needs mean that we have no control over escalating costs. Cost overruns are taken out of conventional forces, which is very damaging. The creation of an SPV should help here. Nuclear needs to be treated separately from Defence.

Our Armed Forces are deployed in only minimal tasks today; we have very little war fighting capability or intervention capability.

The Army today is constructing itself at light/medium weight, and badly needs Air Defence, artillery firepower and the capacity to scale up. A clever Gendarmerie is not enough for the modern battlefield.

We have a strategic deficit in infrastructure and in training resources, and less training is not compensated for by simulation. The Defence Infrastructure Organisation is a disaster

The UK Brigade in Germany is no good as a deterrent against Russia. It would be if it were in Poland. If Russia picks a fight with a bit of NATO we are unable to help. We need to build on the NATO Joint Expeditionary Force

The EU Army is useless, and is just an excuse for EU members not to invest in the fundamental necessities for future wars. It will undermine NATO.

There has been a steady deterioration of planning for as well as of capability and capacity for defence. No mobilisation or resilience planning exists today.

Another real problem is lack of strategic thinking. MOD no longer has capacity for strategic thinking, it does:

- Events management
- Budget management
- information/perception management

Since 2010 the Government has not found strategy useful. Political expediency is more important. There is an obsession with the idea of Iraq and Afghanistan having left a "bad aftertaste" so there is "no appetite for intervention". But this would be different if there was a real need.

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There is no common lexicon, and no education in strategic thinking outside the military (and not enough within it). The French idea which educates officials and ministers and gets them to improve their expertise is a good one we could emulate. But there is no money and everyone is too busy

There is a complete refusal to discuss Russia. We need discussion and debate as to how Russia can be managed and deterred. We need to deal with Russia by doing things that are serious. Our battalion in Estonia are hostages, not a deterrent.

There is now no NATO political consensus to deal with these challenges. There are no NATO plans for the defence of NATO; No UK plan for the defence of the realm.

The current model of UK Govt organisation and command "Collegiate command will not work in a major crisis. Compare this to the Russian National Defence Centre and command system

The UK National Security Council has a 'Command Function', but this is not an operational command system to match the Russian model

The Defence Board does not do strategy. It has data but can't use it – it can't act because it would not fit the political narrative. Consequently, the NSC and Defence Board never discuss these issues in an in-depth way. In NSC, speakers only get 2 mins to talk.

Service Chiefs are insulated from the NSC and Defence Council. We need to bring the Chiefs into the system again as in the WW2 model. The CDS nowadays is only ever asked if something *could* be done, never if it *should* be done.

An effective meeting also needs lots of careful preparation and a long meeting for discussion of key issues at a high level of security.

For an effective meeting of this sort happen, it would need the PM, Home Secretary, Chancellor, MOD and military in a long discussion with all the Chiefs. Without the PM's involvement, discussions will be ignored or forgotten.

Theresa May's coming to power has made no difference. There is still a uniquely Counter Terrorism focus. There is still very strong central control over thinking and discussion. There is no discussion even privately within government.

Where do we go from here?

We must break with the mentality of being in decline

If the world is changing, and warfare is changing, is the current state of the Armed Forces good enough for the future? For general war or for multi dimensional warfare?

In some areas we are doing good things. The Army understands the importance of information warfare and 77 Bde is right. The RN's "Unmanned Warrior", the RAF's "Scavenger" and 77 Bde's exploitation of social media are good examples of our learning to do the right thing. But we need to use *all* levels of national power, and the Forces do not control these. The FCO has a full spectrum effects team (i.e. doing Hybrid Warfare)

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MOD now has some good ISR and information age capability. But we need to tap into Open Source data to understand the world we will deploy into and operate in (Cutting down the BBC Monitoring Service is going in the wrong direction). This expertise is not held within the military. It is in the commercial world. We need to tap it, including through the exploitation of reserves. To do all this needs the complete transformation of intelligence.

Russia may have less equipment in total than NATO, but it is newer, better, more strategically located, and coupled with effective planning and strong political opportunism and will to use force.

We urgently need a plan for the defence of UK/NATO territory, cyberspace etc. None exists.

Looking at what we have and are getting, we need more:

- Air Defence
- Anti-Missile Defence
- Government command and control resilience
- Cyber Defence
- Logistics stocks
- Mobilisation methods (no plan exists for mobilising reserves)

The current model of UK Govt organisation and command “Collegiate command”, will not work in a major crisis. Compare this to the Russian National Defence Centre and command system, which is effective. The UK National Security Council has a ‘Command Function’, but this is not an operational command system to match the Russian model

We need to seize the potential advantage of the information age – processing, AI, robotics, nano-tech, space, virtual reality etc. this is already seen in the civilian world in new organisations etc. Our main challenge is to combine new and different technologies to design and build new capabilities.

Defence intelligence needs to move from its preoccupation with secret data to using open source big data.

We should take a lead from the US, which has always sought to maintain its advantage through the offset of new technology

The 1st offset in the 1950s was through nuclear weapons. The 2nd was precision munitions in the 1980s. The 3rd offset today is to use information technologies to build new capabilities

The UK needs its own version of this both to be a better ally and to be able to do independent operations. We have to listen to the US, NATO and other allies. So we should get them, especially the US, to tell us what is expected of us. Then the PM might listen.

We now need to:

- Examine the overall readiness of UK in a NATO context. Is it good enough?
- Examine our planning for defence of UK and Allies, benchmarked against the opposition
- Examine what the US 3rd offset means for us and how we can keep pace

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N.B. *The Armed Forces cannot themselves speak out and say "we are broken". Generals cannot speak out as that would breach the rules of democratic control, and to give this message to the troops would destroy morale*

The subordination of Armed Forces to MOD (ie Civil Service and Ministers) means that the military do not do policy. Under this system, serving officers will never be able to say how bad things are.

But very few civil servants and politicians understand the complexity of all this. Serving officers can't even speak to MPs to inform them.

This needs a constitutional change. The armed forces would need to go back to being an independent body outside politics. Today they are fully politically subordinated without the ability they had in the past to raise an independent professional voice.

Parliament can no longer scrutinise the executive effectively. The only way for Parliament and academia/think tanks to understand all this is to get resources to research, analyse and describe the problem.

An important question is, how do MPs interest voters in this issue - they do not care about 2% GDP. They need to frame the debate in terms of things people care about. Do they shape the narrative to the risk which Russia (or others) pose to peoples' prosperity? i.e. Alert people to the problem, not to the state of the inventory of our kit.

Today, officials are regulated in how they should think. There is a centrally controlled government narrative. Honesty is a sackable offence. The problem is known by some, but it fits no political narratives, so there is no debate of contentious or difficult issues *inside* government.

So this problem will not be picked up in central government. Government is living with denial.

So, how do we change the current group think in Whitehall? For example, the US brings honest, frank experts into government to challenge it.

New thinking will not come from government today. Government does not understand the problem because it has not faced it for a full generation, plus the distractions of government overstretch and austerity.

There is groupthink in the military too. At Staff College, students are told to think unthinkable, but all their experience is from Iraq and Afghanistan, and Radicals get squeezed out by conventional thinkers. The Royal Navy has the biggest problem here with only 23000 + 8000 Royal Marines. I most needs alternative thinking, but does not do it. The RAF and RN have no vision to think or get beyond operating a few fragile token numbers of equipment.

So, if no catastrophe happens to wake people up and demand a response, then we need to find a way to get the core of government to realise the problem and take it out of the political space. We will need to impose changes over the heads of vested interests. NB We did this in the 1930s

My conclusion is that it is we who must either generate the debate or wait for something dreadful to happen to shock us into action. We must generate an independent debate outside government. The

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French get a debate going through their annual 'Defence University', with open discussion on capability etc, bringing in parliament, government, academics, business etc as well as military.

We need to ask when and how do we start to put all this right? Do we have the national capabilities / capacities to fix it? If so, how do we improve our harnessing of resources to do it?

We need this debate NOW. There is not a moment to be lost.