

KING'S COLLEGE

20 MARCH 2018 – A TOPIC THAT ILLUMINATES THE CURRENT CHALLENGES IN DEFENCE

“DEFENCE’S ROLE IN HMG”

Thank you, Jon, for that kind introduction.

Ladies and gentlemen, I was invited to speak to you on a topic that illuminates current challenges within Defence. I am sorry to have to tell you that the list from which to pick was a long one.

In the words of a long distant boss, I have been overwhelmed by opportunity.

Two weeks ago I described how the MOD was undertaking the Modernising Defence Programme, how we were aiming to meet current and future threats at a time of accelerating challenge and contest. I was surprised by a question afterwards in which it became clear that there is a perception that, somehow, Defence is forging its own path, separated from the other apparatus of national security.

The question was also raised at the Public Accounts Committee and also at a briefing I gave to journalists, both last

week – so I feel I need to demolish it before it reaches the status of fake news.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

I will talk shortly about how Defence is intimately and inextricably woven into the fabric of Government in ways that are too often invisible, but the Russian poisoning in Salisbury has furnished a stark, highly public example of how Defence assets serve the nation.

Our personnel at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory have been pivotal, indeed indispensable, in the investigation, working under long established agreements and relationships, adding their skills where and when they are needed. We should be very proud of those men and women. No other European nation would have been able to bring to bear anything like the expertise of Porton Down.

But whilst important, that is only one example.

What does the nation want?

Since joining Defence six months after the SDSR 2015, and after committing to memory the seven – yes, seven – closely typed A4 pages of acronyms at the back of the Defence Plan, there have been two Reviews of our activity. As I have said elsewhere, I am not troubled by that, and the rapid developments we are now seeing may mean that we need to be less monolithic in the way we assess Defence and Security spending in the future, as, indeed, other countries are.

In any event, I have enjoyed every minute of it. And the National Security Capability Review last year, and now the Modernising Defence Programme, have allowed me to go back to first principles and ask what are we really here to do? How best do we serve the nation? How best do we meet the Government's agenda?

And, despite talk of Defence's budget, we are crystal clear that we are but part of a larger whole. We exist not to fulfil our own destiny. We exist to defend the nation with partners and allies, and achieve the objectives of Her Majesty's Government.

The MDP is our opportunity to make sure we have the right capabilities when the pace of change of forecast threats has

quicken alarmingly. We must build on the plans for the Joint Force that we set out in 2015, making sure that it is more effective in its impact, more resilient and more rapidly innovating, or, perhaps more precisely, more rapid in the deployment of our innovations.

Our public consultation has opened and I would encourage you all to contribute. Let me offer my thoughts on what I believe the nation wants us to focus on:

- **Relevance:** we must be active today and prepared for tomorrow. This is not easy. Our Defence programme must provide kit and capability for our Forces who might use it hours later; but at the same time we are embarked on multi-decade programmes to provide contingency forces, including the provision of our nuclear deterrent capability that will still be in use in the 2060s. To be successful, we must excel at both ends of the spectrum.
- **International and integrated:** Whitehall is at its best when it works together, bringing all the instruments of Government to bear on national challenges of the day. Defence must absolutely play its part, leading when required, supporting at all other times, particularly in the

international space, working together to advance the nation's interests.

- Modern Deterrence: one of the most fundamental, but often least understood, roles of Defence is to deter our adversaries. Most often, deterrence is understood by our nuclear capabilities; but this is not enough for the modern era and we need to think, and act, more widely.
- Affordable: we are all tax-payers, unless anyone in the room wants to confess something. We, I, have been very straightforward with Parliament that we currently face some real affordability challenges that we must seek to resolve on an enduring basis over the coming months. We all want to ensure that Defence spends wisely, has a stable financial base, and has a forward programme that can respond to what the future throws at us.

You may disagree with these, though I doubt – and hope – not. You will, I am sure, want to offer your own thoughts to our public consultation, and I would welcome them. But what I hope you will take from my words is my commitment that Defence will play its role in the whole of Government context.

From security to exports, prosperity to war-fighting, intelligence to deterrence – the MOD will work, deeply integrated with partners across Whitehall and beyond, with a clear focus, underpinned by common aims.

Relevance

To those further examples. Salisbury showed our personnel – military and civilian – deploying at speed to assist with making the area safe, but also offering fundamental support to the authorities through analysis and expertise.

The concept of Defence contributing to other government departments and the national endeavour as a whole is nothing new. Our national history is peppered with the dynamic benefits that come from Whitehall pulling together to drive forward our national ambitions.

We are only two days away from the anniversary of the Westminster Bridge attack. Last year saw a number of such terrible events, in Manchester, at London Bridge, in Finsbury Park.

An integrated Government responded. It is only right that every day, every hour, even this very moment, the British people

should expect and should receive the reassurance that every arm of Government is committed to their safety and Defence.

We activated Op TEMPERER on two occasions last year for exactly that reason.

You will all remember the of the Armed Forces who were deployed within hours, supporting the police, providing a committed and stable resource to reassure and protect. Armed Police units were then able to deploy elsewhere, chasing down the threats and tackling terrorism head on.

Our integration across Whitehall is not just with the “usual suspect” departments.

We work increasingly closely with the National Crime Agency – helping to seize more than £100M of drugs in recent years.

We are working with DEFRA to train elite anti-poaching trackers in Malawi.

There is a standing operation with the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to provide for secure fuel supplies in the case of emergency, one that is kept constantly fresh and trained for.

The Department for Transport relies on Defence for its Aviation Security technology and capability.

Since 2013, our science and technology teams have supported 555 police cases involving explosives, resulting in 113 prosecutions and 784 years of custodial sentences.

International and Integrated

Looking beyond these shores, some 10,000 personnel are currently committed to NATO tasks, with our enhanced Forward Presence in Estonia and Poland, our forces standing by for the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, and from May, air policing in Romania once again.

Looking further afield we remain committed in the Middle East, degrading and destroying Daesh. In South Sudan our UN peacekeepers work in the harshest and most degraded environment alongside our multinational partners, aiming to secure peace in the world's youngest nation.

And as the global environment continues to evolve at speed, we must recognise the increasingly interconnected world in which we live and keep pace with it. The success of a military

mission might depend as much on a diplomat obtaining overflight permissions from a partner nation as it does on the soldiers in the back of the aircraft. And the output of other government departments and agencies often relies on our contribution.

We are reinforcing our close and enduring relationship with France, deploying 3 Chinook helicopters to Mali, and looking the UK is looking forward to welcoming the French to eFP in Estonia.

We are also progressing smaller, focused groups of like-minded countries, usually taking the lead. The Joint Expeditionary Force, a close alliance of the UK, the Baltic and the Nordic nations, is a paradigm example.

History and experience show that some of the closest relationships to be made, stem from joint endeavours in dark times.

Beyond Europe, our friends and allies are diverse and numerous. Later this year thousands of UK personnel will deploy on Exercise SAIF SAREEA in Oman, a clear demonstration of our capability to deploy, at reach, working with our partners.

We need to intensify our relationship with India, Japan and Australia. And we are doing so.

We have the capability and the will to deliver on our words. This year will see deployments of both HMS SUTHERLAND and HMS ARGYLL in the Far East, demonstrating the UK's commitment to security and stability in that region, and to the freedom of navigation.

Last year, our Royal Fleet Auxiliary MOUNTS BAY was in the Caribbean, able to respond to Hurricane IRMA with humanitarian aid she had on board for exactly such a situation. She is back in the Caribbean right now, restocked and poised to respond to more extreme weather if required. In the meantime, she is conducting patrols to counter the illicit trafficking of drugs, people, firearms.

And this is not all. In a speech it is probably rare to use the words "and what I can't say", but this is that moment. You will be unsurprised, and I hope you will be reassured, when I say that Defence has niche skills deployed in support of other parts of Government, in the UK and across the world.

The UK's Defence is a complex machine built of multiple moving parts. And it is unrelenting in its operation. From our intelligence analysts that can use a covert photograph to identify the specifics of a foreign capability, to the forward operators who take that image from the air, from under the waves, or on the ground. From our training teams that work in faraway places, making sure local forces have sustainable capabilities to tackle threats that matter to them and to us; to the surveillance specialists that you will never see.

Defence is constantly active, often in the most difficult and sensitive circumstances, to ensure that our other Government partners, both British and other, can get to work. It would be wrong to go into detail. But it would be worse not to recognise it.

We are where it matters, when it matters.

We are, and will remain, relevant to these challenges and must be recognised internationally as a key responder. We need to understand clearly our national security objectives and where we can lead. And we need to better explain where our capabilities and expertise lie.

Modern Deterrence

Nowhere is that more acute in the than in the sphere of deterrence.

Deterrence is a concept that is much less well understood today than perhaps it needs to be. I have to say, I think it is rather better grasped elsewhere. In a fascinating piece in last Thursday's Financial Times, Valentina, a retired secretary and Muscovite, who refused to give her surname, was reported as saying – and I will not do the accent – “We , my generation, we used to say: ‘If only there isn't war again!’ That's what our nuclear weapons are for, to ensure that no-one attacks us ever again.”

Today's prevailing concept about Defence in Britain is one of insurance, which is not only mistaken, but dangerously so. It leads to a conception of Defence that can only be used in conflict, in the same way that flood insurance is only activated when there is a flood. By extension, if the impoverished homeowner's house is in no danger of flooding their incentives for taking out any insurance will recede to nothingness.

Defence capability does, of course, act in this way, and the possession of a military that cannot be effective in the case of war is a fatally compromised one.

But, as Valentina reminds us, it's equally, perhaps more, vital aim is to prevent war in the first place. She was very keen to point to the Russian nuclear arsenal, developments in which Mr Putin boasted about in his State of the Nation Speech last month – and apparently very popular they were too.

In the UK, the deterrent, too, is shorthand for our nuclear tipped missiles operating from our undetected submarine bombers, which have been at constant readiness since 1968, and which the great national enterprise of building the new Dreadnought class will sustain.

The leading British thinker and practitioner of deterrence was, as the audience knows, Sir Michael Quinlan, who we celebrate next month in the “Legends of Quinlan” event. He is most closely associated with nuclear deterrence, but his thoughts on the subject were far more wide ranging than a sole focus on the uniquely destructive power of nuclear weapons.

He was in the modern parlance a full spectrum thinker.

The aim of deterrence was to prevent *all* war between sophisticated and well-resourced states, not just nuclear war. Firstly, “conventional” war is bad enough to wish to deter, and secondly, war at its most destructive levels can in any event only realistically be reached through lower ones.

In Sir Michael’s words, “deterrence *cannot* operate only by means of nuclear weapons ...the various levels of military force are therefore complementary and interdependent; all contribute to deterrence”.

He wrote those words in 1997, a couple of years after the End of History had been announced. His analysis is the more durable of the two, and I would say that his key insight has even greater relevance and force now than it did 21 years ago.

Why? I give you two reasons. First, it is clear that contest between states is much more acute than it was then, with a greater number of states engaging in that contest, in possession of a broader array of weaponry. The reality, which we would do well to recognise, is that that situation is not going away, and, though this is not the place to expand upon it, the proliferation of offensive state capabilities into the hands of uncontrolled groups is a major concern.

Secondly, the sheer range of weaponry is expanding very quickly, much more quickly than Sir Michael could have possibly predicted in 1997. Though they do not replicate the enormous and binary increase in destructive potentiality that the atomic bomb represented, autonomous systems, directed energy weapons and cyber, to name but three, are all changing what warfare will look like, and they will do so sooner than we might imagine. If we recognise this, and recognise and exploit our comparative advantage in these areas, it will be to the UK's benefit.

I do **not** believe that doctrine has altered very much as a result of this technological abundance. States have always engaged in full spectrum and indeed asymmetric contest – indeed Sun Tzu talks of little else, albeit more elegantly than his modern successors. But what is **certainly** the case is that modern technologies to date have been to the advantage of nations who have, shall we say, less legally constrained models of action and, in particular, who have placed greater reliance on deniability.

What are the consequences for the UK of these developments? In the first place, Defence must be visibly active and visibly deterrent at all points on the spectrum. An example: Defence works very closely with the National Cyber Security Centre (by

sharing information, skilled people and funding, among other things) in order to support their work protecting the UK in general from cyber threats, and to exploit their specialist expertise within defence.

This is deterrence by denial. It is unlikely to be enough. We need to be credibly capable of deterrence of the imposition of unacceptable cost. We need to shift the focus to offensive capabilities to deter the most damaging state enabled attacks.

Being active at all points will fail if capability resources are too thin, and we should be very considered about what that means. We will never maintain all the capability required to defeat a nation that is prepared to devote massively more of its wealth to its military capability.

Fortunately, however, our allies and alliances are the other vital foundations upon which our security rests. Accordingly, we must invest in our international relationships and the values that bind us so that we can rely on others' capabilities and forces in ensuring national and collective freedoms. It is an absolute priority that as the UK leaves one international club, it redoubles its efforts to be a leading voice in all the others, and, indeed to play as full a part as we can in any emerging

European defence and security structures, with all that entails by way of our own visible national resource choices.

These should be profound decisions the nation takes consciously, after full consideration. And Professor Chalmers' recent admonition must be properly confronted: the more radical the commitment to the rapid fielding of new disruptive technologies, the less useful the traditional measures of military capability become as indicators of national military power.

And when we have made those choices, we must be confident that what we have and what we propose to have is fully effective against the range of threats it faces, with the right levels of sustainability. There are few areas where being one brick thick is going to be enough.

Affordable

Let me return to where I began. I expect the Government to make the most of what it has to better defend the nation and advance the interests of our people. We must not duplicate unnecessarily. If we innovate, we must share it. If Defence prospers, we must look to spread it.

But, most importantly, everything we do we must strive to do in an enduringly affordable way.

A stable forward programme is a deterrent more than it is a bureaucratic nicety. The continued media narrative of “Defence cuts” damages our international reputation and lowers the deterrent effect on our adversaries. This is at odds with our growing Defence budget, rising to £40Bn by 2020/2021. The actual reality is that we are a forward-looking organisation that takes every opportunity to look at what we have, look at what we need, and to address the difference.

Achieving enduring affordability is a much more dynamic process, enabling us to invest in the latest technology, at, as our American allies say, the speed of relevance. To shorten the distance between innovation and deployment. To get the right procurement approach to seize the initiative when required.

Success in this area is also reliant upon gaining the public’s trust and support for what we are doing, and that is not always easy. Health care free at the point of delivery is a powerful and clear policy. And the Health Service is a machine transparently and obviously in operation all the time, touching everyone in the country multiple times a year in profoundly important ways.

Similarly with education.

Defence is not like that. It has a harder case to sell, especially in times of apparent peace. But it is active even when silent. To ensure the worst doesn't happen. To deter. Indeed, anything that does happen, is, by definition, something that we and our allies did not deter.

I want there to be a better understanding of that as we seek to modernise Defence.

And that understanding must extend to our adversaries. Our extended deterrence must operate on the thinking of others.

To conclude, I would ask for your support in this important endeavour to better make the case for what we do, how we do it, and how important it is. The idea of a CBRN attack on British soil by a foreign state was largely confined to television until the events of three weeks ago. The vital work done by Porton Down was brought to the forefront of people's minds. The money we had invested in protective equipment was quickly recognised as the Armed Forces assisted the authorities in clearing up the site. Within the unavoidable limitations of foresight, we have to make investment choices,

we need to be prepared. The broader the conversation, the clearer our vision.

Conclusion

I hope what I have said here has done a number of things:

- Reassure you that Defence has not declared UDI, and this includes our work on the Modernising Defence Programme
- Inspire you in just what your Armed Forces and Defence civilians are doing at home and worldwide, right now, every day
- To prompt you to a renewed appreciation of deterrence – full spectrum and interdependent deterrence
- Provoke you on what the future might hold. Your ideas are needed to make that future a better one for the whole of Government, for the whole of the nation.

Recent news headlines have demonstrated that in those areas of business where I am necessarily tight-lipped, we need to do more to put the UK ahead.

It is often easy to focus on the adversary, to devote your time and energy to understanding the threats you face. But our Programme to Modernise Defence is as much about understanding ourselves as it is about understanding the challenging environment in which we work.

If we get this right we will be building a modern Defence, capable of deploying our capabilities where our national security requirements, and our friends and colleagues, need them most.

Capable of adapting at speed. Ready for what is to come.

Thank you.

3,676 words