

NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE 21st CENTURY - PART ONE

by Paula Jaegar

Later this year General Sir Richard Dannatt will step down as UK Chief of the General Staff, ending a career spanning almost four decades. No doubt gongs and plaudits will continue to crown him. But little, I suspect, can please him more than his reputation as the soldier's soldier. At the heart of his leadership is his constant and unfailing duty of care to the rank and file. And the core of his success is his realisation that in the end it all comes down to the training, equipping, condition and morale of every single man and woman under his command.

Those four decades represent unprecedented change; but the years since 2003 have seen the most intense period of reappraisal and review. The footsoldier fighting in the dust of the Upper Sangin Valley may experience something very similar to the wars of his or her forefathers, albeit better equipped, led and fed; but the strategic and regional context has altered immeasurably. And the General believes that the time of steepest adjustment is yet to come.

His sketch of how he and senior Army colleagues see the direction of travel for the next ten or so years:

In 2003, despite cuts resulting from Tom King's 1991 Options for Change [Editor's note : Lord King of Bridgewater, as he is now, is a Patron of the UK Defence Forum] , consolidated by the 1997-98 Strategic Defence Review, the Army had changed little since its Cold War configuration. The spearhead was still based in Germany, the depots, colleges, training programmes well-established and stable. The limit of its experience of combat were the streets and countryside of Northern Ireland. That experience had delivered one particular lesson of huge and continuing importance; the need for strategic patience.

The UK's engagements in the 1990s, in the Balkans, East Timor, Sierra Leone, had given us some clues on how to adapt the structures designed for high intensity conflict to less orthodox situations with other goals. The old maxim, train heavy to fight light - proven capability to conduct more or less full scale conventional operations giving us the confidence in small scale flexings of that developed military musculature - paid dividends in peacekeeping, reconstructive and aid-oriented projects, as did an adaptive mindset.

Nevertheless, in 2003, our operations were two-dimensional and not particularly joint. The bulk of our armoured and mechanised brigades were on deployment as firefighters. The initial invasion of Iraq was conducted by 7 Armoured, 16 Air Assault and 3 Commando Brigades.

Problems were encountered within a matter of days after the military 'victory', as forces had to administer and rebuild a fractured infrastructure, minimise the possibility of multiple local

insurgencies and maintain security. An ongoing longterm stabilisation programme rebuilt the Iraqi security apparatus, created an environment in which economic regeneration could happen, reconnected and expanded provision of utilities and, crucially, contained the violence until the Iraqis themselves could take control. Many of the lessons learned are catalysts for change for the British Army.

The situation in Afghanistan was and is radically different, as was our mission: To assist the embryonic Afghan government to maintain security and to prevent a failed state incubating a new generation of jihadists, native and imported. The initial peacekeeping operation, based in Kabul and Mazar e Sharif in the north, altered radically in summer 2006 with the deployment of 16 Air Assault Brigade to Helmand province, where local rule is law, corruption endemic and the shattered economy runs almost entirely on opium production.

This is a conflict which is likely to consume our Army for the foreseeable future.

IN PART TWO: Recruitment, procurement, UORs, & the role of the media.

General Sir Richard Dannatt, Chief of the General Staff spoke at an IPPR Security Lecture, Transformation in Contact on Monday 19th January 2009

The Institute for Public Policy Research's Commission on National Security has released a report, Shared Destinies, analysing the security climate and our developing responses to it.