

OUR PEOPLE ARE BUYING TIME AND SPACE (with their lives)

This is a strange series which appears to start at number 2.

The reality is that the first realistic analysis was made by the Chief of the Defence Staff Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup in his 2008 speech on Iraq and Afghanistan which we published in full on 1st December 2008. Today he published immediate reaction to the deaths of 8 UK soldiers in 24 hour, which we reproduce below. The sting is in the tail, and from which we draw the sub heading for this piece.

So what are the UK's war aims in Afghanistan? politicians might split hairs and say it's not really a war. Except a lot of our soldiers are getting killed now and it's costing a fortune.

The British people have a right to say - Why?

Classically politicians must tell us:

How will we know we won?

How will the enemy know they lost?

Churchill had no doubt about the Second World War - unconditional surrender. It took the occupation of one enemy's capital city, the use of horrendous and continuous firebombing of cities in Germany and Japan, and ultimately nuclear weapons in the other theatre.

If politicians don't make a credible case, public support for Afghanistan will crumble to the levels of Iraq, and we'll withdraw. That's what the Taliban and Al Qaeda expect, and that's how they will know they've won.

So - why?

Here's what Sir Jock Stirrup said in full :

"Our Armed Forces in Afghanistan have taken some very sad casualties over

the last several days. We feel each loss keenly and our hearts go out

to the bereaved families, to those who have been wounded and their loved

ones. And we will do everything we can to support them in their time of

loss and trial.

"But it is important that we also remember why our people are fighting in Afghanistan and what their achieving through their sacrifice and their courage. The mission in Afghanistan is about supporting the delivery of governance in order to reduce the opportunities for extremist terrorist groups who are a direct threat to the United Kingdom, its citizens and their interests. But governance is a complicated issue and can only be delivered where there is sufficient security.

"It is very clear to everyone who has visited Helmand in particular regularly over the last three years that where we provide the necessary degree of security for its citizen's real governance is starting to emerge. From a very low base certainly and haltingly at times but the provincial Governor Mangal and the District Governors that he has appointed have done some outstanding work and we can see where provide that degree of security the strategy working.

"The problem is that we do not yet provide the necessary degree of security for enough of the population of Helmand and that is what Operation PANCHAI PALANG is designed to address. It will bring somewhere between eighty and a hundred thousand additional Helmandis within the security envelope provided by British and Afghan security forces. A similar synchronised operation by the US Marine Corps in a different part of the province will bring in a similar number. This is a huge step forward in the terms of the development of governance.

"But it's tough going. Our people out there are fighting in extremely adverse conditions, very high temperature and as the Commander out there described it to me earlier today sort of a cross between the Bocage and Belfast. It's tough going

and its tough going because the Taliban have rightly identified Helmand as their vital ground. If they lose there then they lose everywhere and they are throwing everything they have into it. But they are losing and our Commanders on the ground are very clear of that. But it's going to take time and alas it does involve casualties but when its complete there will be the opportunity for considerably greater governance for the people of Helmand and that as I said earlier is what this mission is all about.

"Our people out there know what they are there to do and they know they are succeeding in it. We are there to create time and space within which political solutions can be forged. We have always said from the outset of this operation that the military cannot deliver strategic success but equally it can't be delivered without the military.

"Our people are buying that time and space. We now need to make sure that the opportunities that they are creating are seized and that those political solutions are indeed forged."