

Chief of the General Staff RUSI Land Warfare Conference 2021

Well, good morning everybody. Delighted to see only 180 of you in Church House this morning, it's 27 degrees outside. If we had had a better year, we would have been 800 or so, melting.

Karen and David, thank you very much indeed, for your very warm welcome and, more importantly, for offering the platform of RUSI. Your international reputation really goes before you and the Army is extremely grateful. Let me welcome you all, though, to [RUSI Land Warfare Conference] 2021. It seems a significant year, in many respects, not least because it's good to be back.

Karen reminded you that we skipped a year in 2020, and 2019, by comparison, might for some of us almost feel like a different age. In some respects, a more innocent age because we've been reminded that low probability and high impact events can, and indeed do, occur. For the first time, this generation has discovered what a strategic shock actually feels like; and what the experience is, to live through it. And it often takes a significant and dramatic shock to prompt a principled re-appraisal of our priorities. I think it has reminded us of the importance of thinking much more strategically and expansively about the nature of defence and its relationship with security. And, we're reminded, that today's threats are much more hybrid. They are not only missiles and tanks – dangerous, of course, as they remain – but we're also living with the consequences of an era of truth decay, subversion and disinformation, techno-authoritarianism, and economic coercion.

And, in some respects, we're living with the deliberate weaponisation of those elements of globalisation that hitherto we assumed would keep us both safe and prosperous; such as the free movement of people, goods, data and ideas.

And we've learned, in the context of Covid, that our security also depends on, amongst other things: the integrity of our 5G networks and our wider digital infrastructure; it depends on the control and access to pharmaceuticals; we need to take a view on strategic stockpiling and the necessity to re-shore some of our more sensitive supply chains; and, indeed, we might take a view as to the importance of clean, and reliable, energy for the future. And our security relies just as much on those issues as it does on wider conventional military advantage.

And so the importance of taking a strategic view on all of this at a national level has been re-emphasised, and the notion of strategic resilience and the integrity of our strategic base is back as a core issue; a core issue in an uncertain and unpredictable world. The return of great power rivalry and balance of power considerations once more the currency of strategic exchange.

And so, what price do you want to put on national resilience and, indeed, on

your choice of allies, in the future, with whom to navigate the turbulence of this new geo-political age?

And so, it's in that context that the Integrated Defence and Security Review unveiled a blueprint for a modernised army, a modernised, digitised and expeditionary Army to underwrite a modern Global Britain. That's an army that's right-sized to match the strategic moment. An army that's adapted to the changing nature of systemic competition, adapted to the redistribution of global power, and the rapidly evolving technological landscape.

Because soldiering has always been about evolution, and successful armies have always adapted to changing threats and technology; and given the unrelenting pace, and acceleration of change today, the Army stands on the cusp of another such transformation. Possibly, possibly, the most significant one since mechanisation in the 1930/1940s when we did away with hay-nets and moved to fuel cans accelerating manoeuvre to the speed of the combustion engine.

Well, this Transformation from mechanisation to digitisation is going to be even more significant. From hardware to software. It's not just going to accessorise how we do our business. In some fundamental ways, it promises to change it completely; whilst at the same time rendering legacy systems obsolete ever more rapidly. And it's not too early to get a sense of what's happening as artificial intelligence, ubiquitous encryption and sensors and quantum science transform warfare.

We just look around – the hallmarks of a different form of Land warfare are already apparent – and some small wars – think Syria, Libya, [and] more recently Nagorno-Karabakh – some small wars are already throwing up some quite big lessons.

And there appear to be some inescapable realities: an expanding, much more transparent battle space; effectively one giant sensor; increasing range, and lethality and precision of weapon systems; the centrality of data and digital networks; a much more dispersed, and less-dense battlefield; and the growing application of remote and autonomous systems.

And if we're seeing a mix, and indeed a growing mix, of manned, unmanned and semi-autonomous capabilities, we're also seeing a growing use of surrogates, of private military companies and associated proxies. An unholy mix of regulars and irregulars.

Meet the Wagner Group: conventional and unconventional coming together in hybrid combination. Boots to bots; proxies to pixels, with a proliferation of area denial and anti-access systems.

The reality of cyber: a domain unconstrained by geography and of near-unlimited scope, reach and tempo: Solar Winds and Darkside. That's net-speed, inherently asymmetric, spontaneous and reasonably unattributable, giving rise to an inexorable growth in technical intrusion. The Information Age, already dissolving yesterday's boundaries: fact or fiction; overt and covert; real, simulated or virtual, or all, simply, one and the same thing; home and away;

and even peace and war.

And as this cycle of competition hots up, and the pace of change accelerates, the challenge is to keep up which means transitioning from a legacy of equipment and method rooted in the evolution of our armed forces and the fixed algebra of the Cold War. And the near high-water mark of our doctrine along the inner-German border, And, indeed more latterly, our contemporary fascination with counterinsurgency and the perception and zeitgeist of terrorism as somehow the sum of all our national security concerns.

Well, the challenge today, is regain operational advantage. Exploiting technological innovation to establish a credible asymmetric advantage over our potential adversaries, some of whom appear to have taken a different set of lessons from the history of our own experience of campaigning in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last 20 years.

And so, in the context of this era of geo-strategic broken play, and the changing economics and geometry of Land warfare; expect a greater emphasis on insight and understanding; and on a networked global presence. Expect more emphasis on a wider coalition of partners and allies, not all of them state or international actors; some of them as yet unknown. Expect more emphasis on support and influence and on national prosperity; not least to underwrite our access, basing and overflight, so fundamental to the projection of force and to tackle threats upstream and at source.

And expect the restoration of some of our expeditionary reflexes and the reversal of a growing trend to domestication.

Real premium being placed not just on mass, but on critical mass; relevant, networked, deployable capability to get ahead of 'fait accompli' strategies. And, indeed, to take account of advances in range, the precision of munitions and sensors with commensurate implication for the low-observability of our platforms, their stealth and survivability, their lethality and dispersion.

But in re-imagining the relevance and application of Land Power, and a different form of Land competition in the future, there is an important bottom line. And that is that the job of the Army is to be ready to fight war, and to fight war at its most feral.

Not the war we last fought, or the war we'd like to fight or anticipate having to fight.

But actually, the war we may simply have no choice but to fight and wars are a reciprocal relationship. Put simply, they happen when people who start them think they are going to win, and sometimes they chose you, and when that happens, warfare is a visceral and lethal contest.

Which is why what has emerged from the Review is a sharper, harder and more dangerous Army. And that translates into: a more dynamic and active global posture, leveraging our global network of overseas training hubs for more persistent international presence; an Army that is more expeditionary, and more rapidly deployable; an Army that is more digitally connected and

networked across the domains; effectively, in time, linking satellite to soldier; and it's also an Army that's more specialist and scalable; and an Army that when it fights is more lethal, more mobile and much better protected with a more specialist partnering capability to operate alongside surrogates and proxies, centred on a special operations brigade at the core of which sits a Ranger Regiment to act as the global vanguard of our international relationships.

And we're going to match our growth in unconventional warfare with a commensurate modernisation of our future Ground Manoeuvre force: developing a deep recce strike capability.

Persistent surveillance and target acquisition, matched to ground reconnaissance and electronic warfare, to complement long-range precision strike assets: rockets, artillery, Attack Aviation and armed ISR [intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance].

It's designed to fight a much more lethal and decisive Deep Battle at greater range – almost the Army's 'Midway Moment', that decisive encounter in the Pacific in October '42 when the opposing Japanese and American carrier battle groups never got within 100 miles of one another.

Designed to cue a modernised close combat capability built around a digitised nucleus of upgraded Challenger 3 main battle tank, the Boxer APC [armoured personnel carrier], Ajax reconnaissance vehicle and Apache 64 Echo, and electronic warfare and the next generation of ground-based air defence. Capabilities we have not upgraded during the course of my career.

And taken together, that represents the core of the Land high-intensity war-fighting deterrent, because in driving up our competitiveness in the sub-threshold and sub-conflict space, we've got to retain the capability to escalate up to war-fighting if we had to.

So, this sharper competitive edge is going to be driven and fuelled by three transformation programmes: because it's about much more than structures and capabilities; or even just optimising the Kill Chain that links sensor to shooter; at the heart of the transformation are people. So, the first one is around people, their culture and their skills.

Because we're going to need a different looking workforce as we get into the 2030s.

And the skills that we're going to need across our middle-management in 10 years' time, or so, are going to be discharged by men and women who are probably already in the Army. So, they are going to need some essential upskilling and our career-pathways, educational and training interventions and the wider incentivisation structures are up for significant revision.

There are clearly going to be some technical proficiencies which will be much more efficient and cost-effective to bring in laterally from the civilian and the commercial sector. And I think we're going to need a much greater variety of both Reserve and civilian expertise that we can integrate into a more

blended organisation.

It will be our ability to incentivise in the first place, and subsequently harness, that Whole-Force capability that really sits at the heart of people transformation.

The second programme is around how we apply a much more data-centric Army and incorporate emerging technologies. And that's about research and development and our experimentation priorities. What we, today, call prototype warfare, where we get after synthetics and simulation and the rapid incubation and adoption of cutting-edge defence technologies.

Putting it in the hands of a dedicated unit designed to test and experiment with prototype capabilities, and develop the associated doctrines, structures and tactics to mimic the pace and intensity of transformation that we know takes place on the battlefield. And, today, that unit is an infantry battalion. But I'm pretty sure that it's going to grow in time into an all-arms multi-domain opposing force.

And so that's the second programme – supercharged experimentation, trials and development and associated evaluation.

And that links to the third aspect which is our Land Industrial Strategy, something the British Army hasn't had before. And without which our equipment programme has often been poorly prioritised and appeared somewhat incoherent and piecemeal. And it's certainly been of disproportionately low benefit to onshore industrial capability and wider UK prosperity, certainly by comparison to the Air and Maritime sectors.

So, what I'm talking about is a much more efficient exploitation of new technology, including a very strong environmental and sustainability agenda, not just because we can but because we must. We need to increase the tempo of our acquisition cycle. We need to drive in commercial and skills advantage through a much more diverse industrial base across the United Kingdom. And in the first instance we're targeting about another 10 thousand jobs across the country and more than trebling the Army's export potential.

But, when all is said and done, we still fundamentally rely on the commitment and the inclination of our soldiers to volunteer and to serve. And their fighting spirit, their tenacity and their resolve is actually the only true litmus test of the Army's readiness in a much more challenging and competitive world.

And the transformation that we sit on the brink of, is the transformation that they deserve. It's a blueprint for an Army that speaks to defending the United Kingdom, protecting our people, projecting our national influence and promoting our national prosperity.

It speaks to an Army designed for what lies ahead of us rather than [what] is already behind us; more effective, more responsive, more dangerous and digitally-fit for the Information Age.