

Speech: Armed Forces Minister speech at the RUSI Land Warfare Conference

I'm delighted to be here today. This Conference is always a major event. But this year it feels bigger and even more relevant than usual.

It's not just the Conference's status as a premier, if not the premier, international military event in Land Warfare. It's the unique challenges of the times in which we live and work as military professionals and security experts.

An Era of Unprecedented Threats

We have heard a lot about threat over the past twenty-four hours and over the last year far greater military minds than mine have been publicly outlining their concerns.

The First Sea Lord, Sir Admiral Philip Jones, General Sir Nick Carter, as CGS, General Sir Gordon Messenger, our Vice Chief, and of course our former Chief of the Defence Staff. They all spoke not of potential threats that we could face at some undefined point in the future, but threats that we face now. I thought that Sir Stuart Peach spoke extremely candidly during his annual lecture at RUSI about the proximity of these threats, both in terms of time and space.

Of course, the cynic might see all this as some sort of a coordinated attempt to make a bid for more resource something that is, as you saw from Deborah Haynes' question yesterday very much a hot topic, no less so than in the Lancaster Household. Being married as I am to a Health Minister can make for some interesting discussions! But to believe this would be to ignore the significance of a number of worrying global trends: resource scarcity, fragile states, rising populations, migration, regional tensions, trade disputes, hostile states. I could go on.

I believe that these threats are as acute now as they were in 1963 when RUSI made the bold decision to write to The Times warning the public of escalating dangers but to suggest that the threats we face now are the same as those that we faced during the Cold War would not only be irresponsible, but dangerous. To do so would be to risk strategic malaise.

Back then, things were more straightforward. Ideological divides were clearer, and what constituted war and peace was considered self-evident. But national security in the 21st Century doesn't fit comfortably into those traditional boxes. It's not just the range of dangers we're facing but the breaking down of tradition boundaries, physical and virtual. Our adversaries have recognised this and they are adapting.

Spin the globe and look at the world from Russia's perspective. Consider how they might view threats and whilst we don't know whether they view conflict

as inevitable, they are preparing. Some commentators have suggested that Russia's use of proxy forces and hybrid methods suggest that they don't intend to get their hands dirty.

There is an alternate thesis that Russia have concluded that they are not ready for major combat operations, that they have learnt the lessons from Georgia and the relative failure of their annexation of Crimea, and are now investing hard in the future of their conventional forces.

On this basis, it is a myth to think that Russia won't use hard power at some point in the future. Fires and mass remain central to their way of warfare. You only have to look at Syria to see this in action, in what has become a testing ground for the integration of Russian land, maritime and air capabilities. Russia has at the same time been carving out an advantage in the sub threshold environment using cyber and hybrid methods to cause disruption and to obfuscate.

With a new appetite for risk, and a new determination not to be bound by the rules of the international order, information is being weaponised to sow confusion and create tensions. Tensions that in turn create divisions and opportunities that they can exploit. The 'cracks' to which the CGS referred yesterday. In this anarchic ungoverned space, they are calibrating their activity to understand where the threshold for international response sits. This introduces dangers of escalation and miscalculation.

Tensions once grew slowly, providing us with advance warning of potential conflict but we can't rely on that any longer. We must be ready to respond, at very short notice, and in a wide variety of contexts. But of course Russia is not our only threat. We face a multitude of other challenges: hostile states, global extremist organisations, the rise of nationalism, political fragmentation, organised crime, terrorism and these threats have become so much more acute given the proliferation of sophisticated military hardware that was once the preserve of Tier 1 militaries.

But as we take forward our Modernising Defence Programme, the big question we're asking today is what does "the new normal" mean for our Army? One thing we do know is that the land domain remains vital.

Essential Importance of Land Power

As Sir Mark Sedwill said yesterday, our primary imperative is the protection of our people and HMG's interests, here and around the world but our rules based system is not self-sustaining and it is very much underwritten by hard power. Wars can be won and lost in the land environment, and it is with land forces that we will continue to confront aggression, seize hostile territory, hold it and deny its access to the enemy.

As we do that, the Division must remain the centre pillar to our Joint Force. A benchmark for a credible deterrent and war-fighting capability. The Division is where concurrent tactical actions in multiple domains are planned and co-ordinated, where long range area and precision weapons bring reach and influence and where we can look past the clutter of the close fight, using

systems like Watchkeeper.

It is the Division which provides the umbrella of theatre missile and air defence systems along with offensive and defensive cyber and electronic warfare while aviation extends its scope for manoeuvre. And it is the Division which orchestrates the modern battlefield information system enabling the Joint Force, meshing decisive Special Operations Forces with cyber operations to achieve information advantage and assuring multi-national interoperability through its open system architecture.

Whilst every individual element has utility in its own right, it is the collective capability of the Division that gives it the ability to dislocate and overwhelm an opponent. It is the ability of the Division to be greater than the sum of its parts that will allow it to fight and increase the chances of victory. But to be truly successful we need to out think, anticipate, innovate and integrate.

21st Century Division – Innovative and Integrated

That's why I'm very pleased to announce Exercise Autonomous Warrior, a radical new approach to securing operational advantage. Some of you may have seen the stand set up in the Hoare Memorial Room.

Later this year, a battlegroup from 1 Armoured Infantry Brigade will spend a month on Salisbury Plain, putting the most innovative ideas in Robotics and Autonomous Systems through their paces. They'll work alongside the Royal Marines and the RAF Regiment, and will be joined by the US Army and observers from our other Allies.

The Army will be putting cutting-edge proposals from industry through their paces – over 70 new systems from 45 commercial partners. Ground-breaking innovations in A.I., unmanned autonomous vehicles, force protection and situational awareness will be tested to the limit in the toughest of simulated operational environments. This is partnership in action, the Army and wider Defence, industry and academia working together to get cutting edge technology to our front line.

This partnership is an illustration that our 21st Century Force won't just be innovative with our kit, but integrated with our Whole Force: generalists and specialists; tank commanders and data analysts; industry and employers; and regulars and Reservists. Now, as a Reservist of some 30 years, the Reserve Forces are close to my heart. With Reserves Day next week, now is an opportune moment to reflect on the increased flexibility and the unique expertise that they add.

So, under the Modernising Defence Programme we're looking carefully at our Reserve Forces, with the aim of enhancing national resilience by giving our Armed Forces even more flexibility. As part of that work, we will be testing our arrangements for mobilising large numbers of Reserves. But the need for agility goes beyond the work we do with Reservists and it must be about more than just a single Division.

It is also about the enablers from across the Army, without which the Division would be unable to function. Furthermore, our resilience is founded on our ability to generate a second, follow-on Division to meet the NATO demand signal providing vital wide-area security and stabilisation.

So, if we're to out-think, out-fight, and out-manoeuvre our adversaries, we must continually invest in our Whole Force and that not only means across the Army, but more so than ever, from across the whole of Defence, and indeed the whole of Government. This is fusion.

21st Century Division – Information Dominant

Fighting and winning not only requires the masse of well-equipped conventional forces on the battlefield, but also the ability to dominate in the information environment, fighting in the virtual as well as physical space. Conflicts are not just won or lost on the battlefield but in the heads and hearts of the people and their leaders. Our adversaries believe that truth is malleable, that disinformation, the blurring of boundaries, and the creation of tension will together create an environment in which they can achieve their aims. We need to counter that to make sure the truth is heard.

Our Army knows it can't afford to look in the rear-view mirror years down the line and wonder what our cyber deterrent might have been. That's why we're making our Division fully networked. We're breaking down some of the silos that often divide our military hierarchies, dissolving cultural barriers between specialisms and embedding understanding of cyber and the other new domains into the very heart of our Divisional structures.

And we're giving them the very highest quality of training and preparation. The Defence Cyber School at Shrivenham is already laying the foundations of the skills needed to operate on the modern battlefield and exercises such as Cyber Warrior have marked a step change in our collective capability.

We are already seeing this pay dividends on operations. For instance, during the fight against Daesh, our forces weren't just training Iraqi and Kurdish troops in how to defuse bombs and build bridges. They weren't simply using Typhoon and Tornado to destroy the extremist threat. Behind the scenes they were also countering and rebutting their false narrative. Showing the so-called caliphate for the hollow charade it really was. Tying our enemies in knots in the virtual world so we could destroy them in the real world.

21st Century Division – Internationally Responsive

Finally, the 21st century Division must be international by design. One of our greatest strengths is our network of allies and partners and it's great to see so many of you represented here. At a time of global problems requiring international solutions, it's vital that we continue working alongside you all. Whether it's in NATO, providing reassurance to our Eastern European allies, whether it's as part of the UN where the Army has been at the forefront of a commitment that has doubled in recent years or whether it's as part of our Joint Expeditionary Force of nine like-minded nations, which recently trained together for the first time in Exercise Joint Warrior

in Salisbury.

And just as we operate with multi-national groups, we are determined to keep expanding our bilateral alliances not just with our great friends the US, France and Germany but with other less traditional allies like Ukraine, Georgia and Lithuania, to name just three, where many of the significant “below threshold” challenges from our adversaries are directed.

Like many of our allies, we are committed to plans for the defence of Europe. To that end, we hold some forces, such as 16 Brigade, at very high readiness. The rest of our modernised war-fighting Division are able to follow on quickly behind where our agile new STRIKE brigades will make the most of AJAX and the Mechanised Infantry Vehicle. We’re looking hard at the effectiveness of our infrastructure in Germany – particularly vehicle storage, heavy transport and training facilities.

And, with our allies, we continually test our ability to deploy the combat mass we may well need at short notice. Besides our Enhanced Forward Presence in Estonia, we must also continue our investment in NATO’s international HQ, the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps. And we must build on the success of other initiatives such as the UK-German wide river crossing capability.

Most of all, we must test ourselves as near as possible for the demands of war. So, we can take immense heart from the success of the recent Warfighter exercise in the United States in which our 3rd Division performed credibly under the 18th Airborne Corps, fighting alongside the US 4th Infantry division, our successful exercises in Germany with a Danish Battle Group and the ongoing Combined Joint Expeditionary Force exercises with France.

However, the Army should not just be about reacting to events. In a more dangerous world we must do everything we can to strengthen the international rules-based-order and that means whilst preparing our forces for the worst case, being persistently engaged overseas, so that we can better anticipate threats, build our partners capacity to deal with them, to deter our adversaries and prevent conflict upstream. And perhaps most importantly we need to be clearer at all levels of Defence, across Government and within international alliances, about responsibilities and permissions, without which we risk strategic paralysis. I was particularly taken by Lord Hague’s comments yesterday about the need for a new Article 5B.

Conclusion – Whole Force

So, in this hybrid age we are making the 21st Division and Army a reality. One that is able to manoeuvre in the physical and virtual domain that is stronger than the sum of its parts, that is international by design, that is integrated into the Joint Force and that is fused with the rest of capability across government.

Above all, a force that will leave our adversaries and allies alike in no doubt whatsoever that the UK as it has always done retains the strength, the will and the skill to defend our nation, our values and our way of life.

Thank you.

[News story: British Army set to redefine warfare with joint Autonomous Warrior](#)

Autonomous Warrior, the 2018 Army Warfighting Experiment, will push the boundaries of technology and military capability in the land environment.

And one of the key areas it is set to test is the autonomous last mile resupply. The 'last mile', which represents the extremely dangerous final approach to the combat zone, is crucial to ensuring soldiers have the food, fuel and ammunition to keep them alive.

Autonomous Warrior will test a range of prototype unmanned aerial and ground cargo vehicles which aim to reduce the danger to troops during combat.

The British Army is set to launch the four-week exercise on November 12, with a Battlegroup from 1 Armed Infantry brigade providing the exercising troops and taking responsibility of command and control.

British soldiers will test and evaluate the effectiveness of robotic and autonomous systems (RAS) on the battlefield.

These technological advances will play a key role in the Army's Strike capability, ensuring our forces remain unmatched on the global stage.

Defence Minister Mark Lancaster said:

Our Armed Forces continue to push the limits of innovative warfare to ensure that we stay ahead of any adversaries or threats faced on the battlefield.

Autonomous Warrior sets an ambitious vision for Army operations in the 21st Century as we integrate drones, unmanned vehicles and personnel into a world-class force for decades to come.

As well as demonstrating the vehicles during the last mile, Autonomous Warrior will also develop capabilities in surveillance which will greatly improve the effectiveness of long-range and precision targeting by service personnel.

The exercise is the result of a large collaboration between the British Army, Royal Navy, Royal Air Force, US Army, MOD, Dstl and around 50 industry

participants.

The new Chief of the General Staff, Gen Mark Carleton-Smith, who will give his first address in his new role at the conference, setting out the backdrop of a “darkening geo-political picture” as he calls for British forces to be “combat ready today and prepared for tomorrow”.

Giving the closing address, Gen Carleton-Smith will stress the need for British forces to work with their allies not just in the battlefield, but also in the virtual world. He will warn that “we live in exceptionally unstable times and that the world has never been more unpredictable”.

As he describes how “the nature of warfare is broadening beyond the traditional physical domains” he will add that 21st Century battlefield requires non-traditional skills, beyond those normally associated with careers in Army, to ensure British forces remain world leaders.



Gen Mark Carleton-Smith will say:

We need a more proactive, threat-based approach to our capability planning, including placing some big bets on those technologies that we judge may offer exponential advantage because given the pace of the race, to fall behind today is to cede an almost unquantifiable advantage from which it might be impossible to recover.

Autonomous Warrior will play an integral role within the £800 million Defence Innovation Fund which supports ground-breaking ideas aimed at transforming both defence and British industry.

The land-based exercise follows on from the hugely successful 'Unmanned Warrior' which the Royal Navy demonstrated autonomous systems diving, swimming and flying together to engage in surveillance, intelligence-gathering and mine countermeasures.



[News story: Defence Minister visits world leader in tactical military bridges](#)

During a visit to WFEL in Stockport, a military design and manufacturing company that has worked with the Government for nearly four decades, the minister saw how the department's funding was supporting employment in every corner of the nation.

WFEL, which employs 230 staff, has supplied tactical military bridge systems to more than 40 armed forces across the globe, including the UK, USA and Australia.

Defence Minister Guto Bebb said:

WFEL provides world-class bridge systems that enable UK Armed Forces to be rapidly deployed across the globe and project military power in any eventuality.

Defence suppliers are at the heart of British industry and the MOD will ensure that our home-grown companies continue to develop, thrive and export their innovative products to our international partners.

One of WFEL's most enduring products is the Medium Girder Bridge, which was originally developed in partnership with the MOD.

The highly adaptable, deployable and transportable tactical bridges ensure military equipment and personnel can get to where they are needed, whether that is during conflict or a humanitarian crisis.

During the lifetime of the bridge project, the MOD has invested millions into equipment and support services with the firm, boosting the local economy and employment.

There are a range of current opportunities for further MOD investment in the company, with WFEL bidding to update and replace some of the UK's current military bridging systems.

[Press release: Study points to new ways to reduce conflict in fragile states](#)

The [Elite Bargains and Political Deals research](#) indicates that greater focus on the politics of conflicts, and those who control power and resources on the ground, is crucial to reducing violence.

The Minister for the Middle East and for International Development Alistair Burt said:

“This research report sets out to answer two of the most difficult questions in foreign policy today: How can we help reduce levels of violent conflict? And how do we deal with the often unsavoury groups and individuals that sustain them?

Today, thousands are suffering in seemingly intractable conflicts across the world. We must do what we can to reduce their plight and minimise the dangers

that conflict and instability pose to our own national security.

We need to keep reviewing our approach in light of experience, and that is what this report seeks to do.”

The report is the result of 18 months of research by cross-government and independent academics and was launched on 14 June at Chatham House.

The study seeks to provide a more robust evidence base for the UK’s approach to stabilisation and to help policymakers provide more effective interventions in conflict contexts. Lessons from global conflicts, past and present, are identified in the report.

Further information

The Stabilisation Unit is an agile, cross-government unit that provides advice and expertise to prevent and de-escalate conflict and meet national security challenges in high-risk environments.

Follow Minister Burt on Twitter [@AlistairBurtUK](https://twitter.com/AlistairBurtUK)

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[News story: Four unknown soldiers killed during WW1 are laid to rest with full military honours](#)

One unknown soldier of the Machine Gun Corps (MGC) and 3 unknown soldiers of unknown regiments have finally been laid to rest after they were killed during World War 1. The 4 soldiers were buried earlier today (Wednesday 13 June) at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Loos British Cemetery, France.



Members of the RTR provide a bearer party for their fallen comrade. Crown Copyright. All rights reserved

The service, organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services, was conducted by the Reverend Stephen Pratt CF, Chaplain to the Royal Tank Regiment (RTR). The RTR provided both the bearer and firing party for the ceremony.



Members of the RTR lay their colleague to rest. Crown Copyright. All rights reserved

Nicola Nash, JCCC said:

It's a great honour to be here today to lay these brave men to rest, who fought so courageously alongside their comrades. Although we have not been able to identify them, they were still buried with the dignity and respect that they deserved.

The remains were found in December 2016 during construction work in the Vendin-le-Vieil area of northern France. Two MGC shoulder titles and a cap badge were found along with the soldiers, plus numerous items of British Army kit.

Reverend Stephen Pratt CF said:

It was a great privilege to lead the service for 4 unknown soldiers who sacrificed themselves, that we might have freedom.

The heavy branch of the MGC was the first to use tanks in combat during the Battle of the Somme and was subsequently amalgamated into the Tank Corps, later known as the RTR. The RTR is the oldest tank unit in the world and the regiment has been deployed on all major conflicts since the end of World War 2. The RTR recently celebrated their Centenary and are fiercely proud of

their history.

Warrant Officer (W01) Harley Upham, Royal Tank Regiment said:

I am deeply honoured and moved to have been here today. The Machine Gun Corps and Tank Corps is in our DNA. We who are the current custodians of the Regiment and of what came before us, will never forget the sacrifice and immense debt which we all owe to them and especially to all the Officers and Soldiers of the Machine Gun Corps and Royal Tank Regiments who have made this Regiment what it is today.



Vickers Machine Gun from WW1. Crown Copyright. All rights reserved

Mel Donnelly, CWGC said:

Two new headstones, one engraved with 'Unknown Soldier of Machine Gun Corps' and one engraved with 3 'Unknown Soldiers of the Great War' have been provided by the CWGC, who will now care for their final resting place in perpetuity.



New Headstones provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Crown Copyright. All rights reserved