

The Generals and Twenty-First Century War

‘The wars of peoples will be more terrible than the wars of kings’¹
Winston Churchill in the House of Commons, 1901.

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Foreword

In 2005, and following some six years of painstaking research, Westmorland General Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends – the Quakers in north-west England, which had witnessed the historical beginnings of the Quaker movement – published *Preparing for Peace*, in which acknowledged world experts discussed the value of war as a wise and effective tool of democracy in the modern world.

New research followed naturally from that beginning. The text which follows and is entitled *The Generals and Twenty-First Century War* was completed in February 2010 and approved for publication by the renamed Westmorland Regional Meeting on 20 March 2010.

During the calendar year 2009, I had tried to trace and record the assessment made by many senior generals and above, acting and retired, as to the value of war as a tool of diplomacy in the modern world. Although the bulk of what follows focuses on that year, it also necessarily relates to the recent past. Whilst there are exceptions, the majority of military spokesmen seem to urge governments and the civil populations to understand the increasing futility – indeed, sheer irrelevance – of armed conflict as an effective tool for solving modern disputes or crises.

Civilians and the politicians we elect are urged to find new ways of non-violence for solving political crises between nation states in the modern world. Quakers and other non-violent civilian groups around the world stand ready and willing to assist this process.

Brian W. Walker, July 2010

Introduction

In modern history, some three points of view may be defined concerning the morality and effectiveness of armed warfare when used to secure judicial, political or diplomatic objectives.

First, and traditionally, wars may be declared by the state(s) to be morally justified, and therefore must be fought, however reluctantly, to ensure the security, or the safety/integrity, of the state and its populations.

Thomas Aquinas (1224–74) codified the classic conditions which must be met if armed conflict is to be judged morally acceptable. These included legitimate authority, last resort, formal declaration, reasonable expectation of success, proportional means, that any war undertaken should not constitute a greater evil than the evil it is intended to remedy, and that there should be no killing of innocents. These were redefined in modern times through the Treaty of Westphalia² (1648), followed, post-1945, by a range of agreed UN resolutions.

In modern times, ordained clergy (padres) have provided a full-time priestly and caring service on and off the battlefield.

Conversely, pacifists believe no conditions can justify modern, armed warfare because it inevitably involves the killing and maiming of innocent civilians, including women and children. Pacifists who take this position, therefore, refuse to take up arms. In many democracies, pacifists have secured in law their right to exemption, or partial exemption, from military service. They are also free to seek to persuade others of the wisdom and the effectiveness of their position – often claimed to be justified by religion or ideology, sometimes by common sense buttressed by a strongly held belief that ‘all people are equal’, and that ‘there is that of God in every person’. A strongly held ethical or political conviction that we ought, in any case, to live in peace with one another is commonly held. Such believers usually seek to contribute peacefully to the resolution of whatever is the cause of ‘war’.³ Classically, the Friends Ambulance Unit, established in World War One (1914–18) by the Religious Society of Friends – the Quakers – works on, or over, the frontline without recourse to arms, in order to help, rescue, nurse or treat wounded soldiers/civilians from all sides of the conflict and without discrimination. In so doing, they knowingly put their own lives at risk.⁴

Many in this situation make an important distinction between ‘violence’ (which is unacceptable), and ‘force’ (which may be necessary) in their search for peace, or in their own contribution to the righting of perceived wrongs. Such distinction needs careful analysis and definition.

This paper seeks to define and illustrate a new phenomenon emerging late in the twentieth century, but found worldwide. This argues that no war can be declared wise or sensible because, given the conditions of the twenty-first century, its aims must be, virtually, unobtainable; nor can they be made moral given the nature of modern warfare. Thus peaceful alternatives ought to be found for resolving diplomatic breakdown, or coping with the eruption of illegal armed intervention, whether by the state or other forces.

The critical advocates of this new phenomenon are an increasing number of senior military chiefs around the world, from the rank of general and above.

What the Generals are Saying

Globally, many senior military personnel have begun to question their role when ordered to use war as the prime tool for settling diplomatic breakdown between nation states. In September 2006, for example, Israel's former chief of staff, General Moshe Ya'alon was quoted in the Israeli *Haaretz* newspaper declaring, in respect of that country's recent war in the Lebanon, 'Going to war was scandalous and he' – Prime Minister Olmert – 'is directly responsible for that ... Therefore, he must resign.'⁵

Earlier, in 1983, the late Brigadier General Michael Harbottle, former chief of staff of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, wrote: 'There is a subtle difference between peace enforcement and peacekeeping. The former seeks to destroy an enemy whilst the latter is concerned with ending violence by non-enforcement means ... the difference between the inhumane and the humane.'⁶ General Harbottle founded the Centre for International Peacebuilding to study and advocate what he described as 'Proper Soldiering'. He was a founder member of Generals for Peace and Disarmament, established in 1981 (during the Cold War). This was composed of a group of retired senior officers of NATO's armed forces dedicated to studying and analysing new concepts of security based on cooperation instead of confrontation.⁷ Retired Russian, Indian, and African – as well as American and NATO top officers – gave their active support. General Olusegun Obasanjo, for example, was a member. He was already head of Nigeria's army, and destined to become Nigeria's president in 1999. One of his first decisions when appointed army chief was to return 19,000 child soldiers to their village homes, ordering them to till the fields so as to grow food crops, with particular emphasis on vegetables desperately needed by local people for health purposes.

General Sir Mike Rose, now retired, but formerly deputy commander-in-chief in the UK, and earlier commander of the UN Protection Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1994–95), wrote in January 2006 that 'the impeachment of Mr Blair is now something I believe must happen if we are to rekindle interest in the democratic process.'⁸ Four years later, in December 2009, the now ex-prime minister Blair advised he would still take the decision to go to war in Iraq, despite the evidence that WMD has not been found in Iraq.⁹

Two years earlier, General Sir Rupert Smith, formerly NATO's deputy supreme commander, had argued in his book, *The Utility of Force*, that '... war no longer exists ... We have moved away from "industrial wars", wars between nation states, into a new age in which war is now always "amongst the people"'.¹⁰ He continued: 'We are engaging in conflict for objectives that do not lead to a resolution of the matter directly by force of arms, since at all but the most basic tactical level, our objectives concern the intentions of the people and their leaders, rather than territory or forces.'

In a similar vein, Lieutenant General David Richards, who took command of NATO forces in Afghanistan in 2006, immediately made clear that his key objective was to capture the hearts and minds of the Afghan people – a task, he explained, requiring words, education, economic support and freedom. Such aspirations, he continued, demand diplomacy, negotiation, education, the abolition of poverty, and the careful establishment of civil institutions reflecting creative civil leadership, as distinct from despotic rule – not guns, not bombs, not repression. By August 2007, however, Brigadier John Lorimer was advising that the war in Afghanistan was likely to last thirty years or more,¹¹ a clear testimony that war cannot be won militarily.

In July 2007, he was supported in this by Lord Paddy Ashdown,¹² formerly a professional soldier, then leader of the UK Liberal Democratic Party, and later the UN High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although Lord Ashdown believes fighting the Taliban and al-Qaida may well be a necessary precondition for forcing them to find peaceful ways forward (through international Saudi government led peace talks), he has consistently argued that failure in Afghanistan is likely if success is measured by the number of Taliban/al-Qaida our forces kill. Success, he wrote, ‘is not measured in dead Taliban, it’s measured in how many water supplies are being reconnected; how many more people have the benefit of the rule of law and good governance; how many have the prospect of a good job; and above all, whether we are winning or losing the battle for public opinion, which is central to successful reconstruction.’¹³ Nevertheless, British forces in Afghanistan were directed by their political masters to implement an American-style ‘search and destroy’ policy using 1,000lb bombs to target the enemy, despite knowing that significant numbers of women, children, civilian men and aged people would inevitably be killed and/or wounded.

Two years later, Lord Ashdown was widely reported again advising that Britain and the USA ‘are losing the war in Afghanistan’ and will see the ‘return of al-Qaida and the possible collapse of Pakistan’.¹⁴ Britain, he said, had made a military error of ‘major proportions’ in going to war in Helmand. Subsequently, during a BBC Radio 4 broadcast on 5 September 2009, he argued that Britain had made catastrophic mistakes and that the war in Afghanistan still needed to be won. Ashdown’s persistent conviction is that the Afghan war lacks any coherent strategy and, therefore, is doomed to fail.

An article in *The Observer* newspaper reported that at a meeting of European experts in October 2006, Field Marshal Lord Peter Inge, former head of the UK’s armed forces, also said that there was a lack of any ‘clear strategy’ guiding British operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and that we seemed to have lost the capacity to ‘think strategically’.¹⁵ This certainly seemed to be borne out when, in February 2007, the Alternate Intelligence Unit operational in the Pentagon prior to the war in Afghanistan under Donald Rumsfeld and led by his appointee, Mr Douglas Feith, asserted, in respect of justifying the war in Iraq, that Saddam Hussein was linked to al-Qaida – a link which was highly improbable.

In July 2007, Field Marshal Lord Inge addressed the UK House of Lords during its debate on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He spoke for all the general staff. He said, ‘The situation in Afghanistan is much worse than many people recognise.’ He continued, ‘We need to face up to the consequence of strategic failure in Afghanistan and what that would mean for NATO ... We need to recognise that the situation is much, much, more serious than people want to recognise.’¹⁶

In similar vein, General Lord Guthrie, former chief of the UK’s defence staff, in a press interview, denounced our renewed attack on southern Afghanistan as ‘cuckoo’.¹⁷ He further advised that the last hope for Iraq following the war was to create a loosely ‘federated’ Iraq but this, he declared, ‘was a last chance saloon’ option. Ought the United Kingdom’s foreign policy to focus on ‘last chance saloon’ options?

American generals have a reputation – perhaps as a consequence of the intervention of Hollywood – of being somewhat gung-ho in the execution of their professional skills. But in real life, many of their actions remain precisely the opposite of fictitious film scenes. Vietnam colonel turned Boston University academic Colonel Andrew Bacevich, in his closely argued book, *The New American Militarism*, subtitled, ‘How Americans are Seduced

by War’, advises, ‘Since the beginning of the industrial age, war has time and again proven to be all but ungovernable.’¹⁸ He goes on to analyse what he calls ‘the limited utility of armed force.’

The Effect of Friendly Fire

One standard consequence of modern war is the inevitable but illegal killing of civilians. In June 2007, for example, US forces in Afghanistan shot and killed seven children under this category.¹⁹ Hundreds more innocent civilians are reportedly killed under similar circumstances. In the first seven months of 2008, 540 Afghan civilians were killed in US/NATO air strikes.²⁰ The use of drones (unmanned aircraft) to bomb civilian villages in Iraq/Afghanistan was introduced despite them being highly likely to result in the killing of innocent civilians – an illegal act under international law.²¹

The Futility of Modern War

By September 2008, the BBC was reporting that 4,162 American soldiers had been killed in Iraq,²² whilst British casualties stood at 175.²³ Financially that war alone was to cost taxpayers £8 billion sterling. Later, in January 2010, the UN reported that Afghan civilian deaths in 2009 had mounted to 1,630.²⁴

Even when wars appear to ‘work’, scholars like Martin Shaw in his book *The New Western Way of War* argue that war is, nonetheless, ‘degenerate’.²⁵ Meanwhile, Dr Paul Moorcraft, a former policy expert in the UK Ministry of Defence, states bluntly, in respect of another theatre of warfare: ‘There is no military solution to the plight of civilians in Darfur, Sudan.’²⁶

‘Futile’; ‘limited utility’; ‘all but ungovernable’; ‘no solution’; ‘desperate’; ‘uncontrollable’. Increasingly, this is the language used by military experts in respect of war in the twenty-first century. It is also the language of redundancy. It is the generals and senior military advisors who are urging the abandonment of war as humanity has known it.

Bacevich’s boss during the profoundly immoral war in Vietnam (1964–75) was secretary of defence Robert McNamara. It took him thirty years to publish his experience of running an American war for presidents Kennedy and Johnson. In his book *In Retrospect* he denounces war on virtually every page. He too calls it ‘futile’ and ‘uncontrollable’. It is a tool which sometimes exacts what he calls ‘a staggering price from victor and vanquished alike’. He notes: ‘It persuaded many that war itself – especially as waged by obtuse American generals doing the bidding of mendacious civilian officials – has become an exercise in futility.’²⁷

Ten years after McNamara’s book, *The Times of India*²⁸ claimed that John Sawyers, Prime Minister Blair’s personal envoy in Baghdad, echoed the same indictment, when he advised that the war in Iraq was ‘an unbelievable mess’ and that the US military leadership was ‘well-meaning, but out of their depth.’ He concluded, ‘We may have been seduced into something we might be inclined to regret. Is strategic failure a possibility? The answer has to be “yes”.’ He went on to define US military leadership: ‘No leadership, no strategy, no co-ordination, no structure, and inaccessible to ordinary Iraqis.’

Meanwhile, the former chief of staff of the Australian army, Lieutenant General John Coates,

advised in February 2007, ‘It is a fact that most wars end untidily – but there is cause to believe that a realistic plan to quickly restore the lives of the Iraqi people to near normality simply did not exist ... Not only is it impossible to see an end to the conflict, it is also impossible to predict the form that such an ending might take.’²⁹

Brigadier General Tim Grant, Canadian Commander of Allied Forces in Afghanistan, bluntly advised, ‘Killing Taliban is not going to get this country sorted out.’³⁰ In fact, the aims of war in Afghanistan have been discredited – to kill or capture bin Laden and Mullah Omar, to destroy al-Qaida, to implant democracy especially amongst women, to eliminate opium, and to protect the UK.

The celebrated military chief Colonel Tim Collins, when lecturing at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, was applauded by fellow officers when he said as one who had commanded the First Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment during the invasion of Iraq: ‘We clearly have no plan. We are relying entirely on military muscle to impose freedom and democracy.’³¹ But freedom and democracy cannot be imposed. They only grow out of sympathetic, non-violent, socio-political conditions.

Famously, Britain’s top soldier, General Sir Richard Dannatt, took to the media in October 2006 to urge that the UK ought to withdraw from Iraq as ‘soon’ as possible, or risk serious consequences to both Iraqi and British society. The Iraq war, he explained, was jeopardising British security around the world. On 26 August 2007, he advised that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were likely to last for thirty years before British troops could be fully withdrawn.³² The former head of British forces, General Sir Mike Jackson, in his autobiography, described America’s post-war strategy in Iraq as ‘intellectually bankrupt’.³³ Two days later, Major General Tim Cross, the senior British officer involved in post-war planning for Iraq, described US policy in this context as ‘fatally flawed’.³⁴

Across the Atlantic, Lieutenant General William Odom, writing about the war in Iraq in the prestigious US Journal, *Foreign Policy* in April 2006, and doing so on behalf of what was called the Revolt of the Generals, chose as the title for his article ‘Cut and run – you bet’.³⁵

In March 2007, the newly appointed overall commander in Iraq, General David Petraeus, warned ‘there is no military solution to the conflict’.³⁶ Eventually, he said, Iraqi leaders would have to sit down and talk. He told his own troops, ‘There is no military solution to a problem like that in Iraq.’ Four months later he warned again that ‘Fighting the insurgents could take decades.’³⁷ On 10 September 2007, when he reported formally to the US Congress, General Petraeus advised that the so-called ‘surge’ was working and that in 2008 a number of troops would be sent home. However, his colleague, the US Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, whilst supporting the broad conclusions of General Petraeus, added, ‘The country came close to unravelling politically, economically, and in security terms.’ He went on, ‘I cannot guarantee success in Iraq.’ Then, ‘An Iraq that falls into chaos or civil war will mean massive human suffering – well beyond what has occurred within Iraq’s borders.’³⁸

In an interview for CNN³⁹ in October 2007, US Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez declared the Iraq war to have been a ‘catastrophically flawed, unrealistically optimistic war plan’. He judged the war mission to have been wrongly designed and managed from ‘about the 15th June 2003’ – the day he took overall command of allied forces in Iraq. It was, he said, ‘a nightmare with no end in sight’; those who controlled events were ‘derelict in the performance of their duties’ and offered, in his judgement, ‘catastrophic leadership’.

Former US president Jimmy Carter, when honoured by Oxford University with an honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Law in June 2007, said, ‘I thought before, during, and since the Iraqi invasion that it was completely unjust and unnecessary; it was implemented on the basis of false premises or misleading statements, and it has turned out to be a tragedy ...’⁴⁰

That same month, Labour members of the UK’s House of Commons Defence Committee warned that they had been advised by Brigadier General Chris Hughes that British soldiers were going on ‘nightly suicide missions’ in southern Iraq, and that it was inappropriate to talk about ‘victory’ in Iraq. The only reason British troops remained in Iraq was ‘because of our relations with the US.’ It was doubtful, he said, ‘that this was a price worth paying.’⁴¹

American casualties by July 2007 stood at 3,606. Iraqi casualties, mostly civilian, probably exceed an estimated 600,000, over 160 times higher than military casualties! It is conservatively estimated that 31 per cent of these casualties are a direct result of US military violence.⁴²

Robert Gates, when examined by Congress during the Iraq war as to whether he would be chosen as secretary of defence at the Pentagon to succeed the ‘failed’ Donald Rumsfeld, testified: ‘Once war is unleashed, it becomes unpredictable.’⁴³ What warning signal should this frank admission give to policymakers in the twenty-first century?

The following day, former secretary of state Jim Baker tabled his group’s devastating report on the war in Iraq. It observed, bleakly and succinctly, ‘the current approach is not working. That is the heart of the matter.’⁴⁴ And, they added, ‘It will apply increasingly to any serious conflict in the 21st century.’ The then US (Bush Jnr) administration ignored the Baker report. Meanwhile, former president Mikhail Gorbachev of Russia, whose policy was designed to be key to the disintegration of the Cold War, was arguing that ‘The arrogance of military power has led to a grave crisis – and to a decline of the United State’s role and influence’. He continued, ‘If America’s leaders have the foresight and the courage to look at the world as it really is, they would choose dialogue and cooperation rather than force.’⁴⁵

In September 2007 the Rt Hon David Miliband, the UK Foreign Secretary, advised, ‘While there are military victories, there never is a military solution.’⁴⁶ At much the same time, Russia’s Foreign Minister held that there was no military solution to any modern problem. As if to echo this, Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith, commander of British forces in Afghanistan, having overseen the successful transportation of water turbines across country so as to bring clean water to villagers, said, ‘We understand the problems here much more clearly. We have a strategy that looks as though it may work.’⁴⁷ He defined that strategy as negotiating disputes rather than using violence. In this he echoed General Sir Richard Dannatt’s advice⁴⁸ stated above. Unfortunately, twelve months later (14.12.09) it was reported that the main turbine had not been installed because the supply road down which aggregates and cement would be delivered could not be made safe from Taliban attacks.

In October 2007, Sir Richard Dearlove, the former head of the UK’s MI6 at the time of the invasion of Iraq, advised that government had placed far too much weight on intelligence gathered and presented to them by the UK and other countries’ intelligence forces. The war in Iraq demonstrated the dangers when ‘policy was built around intelligence and little else or when it was used for primary justification for government action’. Policy, he said, was ‘over-dependent on intelligence, particularly when it was presented to parliament.’⁴⁹ In December 2007, US intelligence agencies disclosed for the first time that Iran had not been pursuing a

nuclear weapons development programme of research for the previous four years.⁵⁰

In late 2008, Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, chief of the defence staff, advised that no more British troops should be sent to Afghanistan unless other countries did so first. He advised that Prime Minister Hamid Kharzai's writ was basically limited to Kabul, and repeated that what Afghanistan actually needed was help in building civil society and its economy – not troops, nor war.⁵¹

Nuclear War

In respect of nuclear war, as long ago as 1979, Earl Mountbatten, UK chief of staff, and Admiral of the Fleet, had set the tone for the peaceful resolution of diplomatic breakdown when he announced, 'As a military man who has given half a century of active military service, I say in all sincerity that the nuclear arms race has no military purpose. Wars cannot be fought with nuclear weapons. Their existence only adds to our perils because of the illusions they have generated.'⁵²

In January 2007, the four leading American architects of the Cold War – secretaries of state Kissinger and Schulz, secretary of defence Perry, and chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Nunn, at last reversed their Cold War position so as to urge the abolition of all nuclear weapons and the strengthening to that end of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. America, they now argued, should lead the way.⁵³ On 24 September 2009, Prime Minister Brown announced that the UK would reduce its Trident submarine fleet from four submarines to three.⁵⁴ It remains to be seen, however, whether the UK will reduce its 160 warheads, which is the critical issue. On the same day, the UN Security Council, chaired by President Barack Obama, voted unanimously for the first time for a resolution on disarmament and non-proliferation.⁵⁵ The resolution is non-binding, but according to subsequent developments in December 2009, the USA and Russia were due to sign a treaty reducing the number of deployed strategic weapons from 2,000 plus each to 1,500 each.⁵⁶ This represents some progress.

The Legality of War

On 18 November 2008, Lord Bingham of Cornhill advised, in his first speech since retiring as the country's most senior law lord, that in his reasoned judgement the UK's declaration of war in Iraq by Prime Minister Blair was a 'serious violation of international law' and 'that Britain and the USA could unilaterally decide that Iraq had broken UN resolutions, passes belief.'⁵⁷

On 30 July 2009, the British government announced an inquiry into both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars to be headed up by the distinguished, recently retired civil servant Sir John Chilcot. The prime minister's decision to hold the inquiry in secret was reversed only after public outcry.⁵⁸

On the 27 July 2009, the Rt Hon David Miliband, the UK Foreign Secretary, had announced that talks could be held between British and American envoys on the one side and Afghan Taliban leaders on the other to help resolve the now eight years of war in Afghanistan.⁵⁹ In the following month, however, General Sir David Richards, who was to assume command of

British forces later that month from General Dannatt, advised that although he thought the war was 'winnable', he considered it would take forty years to achieve that objective. The Afghan government in Kabul, however, faced elections in August 2009. In the event of fraudulent practices which invalidated some 2 million votes, a rerun was announced in October 2009. The election was not held because of the 'depth and extent of fraud'. Nonetheless, President Kharzai was reappointed. Meanwhile, some fifteen ministers of President Kharzai's previous and current administrations were reported as being under investigation for corruption.⁶⁰ Following further investigation, Kharzai was stripped of 954,526 votes deemed to be fraudulent. The situation, therefore, remained fluid and hopelessly unpredictable.

Notwithstanding the above, it is salutary to note that every war in human history ends when the two (or more) sides start talking to each other: 'jaw-jaw' as Churchill had advised, is wiser than 'war-war'.

Late in August 2009, after an increase in British army casualties, General Sir Richard Dannatt was reported as advising that 'I believe that the UK will be committed to Afghanistan in some manner – development, governance, security sector reform – for the next 30 to 40 years.'⁶¹ By December 2009, some 85,730 UK civil servants were employed to service 101,790 troops in the field.

General Sir David Richards, who took over as commander in chief on 28 August 2009 advised, conversely and contrary to many other commentators, that he thought the war 'was winnable'.⁶² Towards the end of the month, however, writing for *The Guardian* newspaper, Air Chief Marshall Sir Jock Stirrup advised that whilst 'what we are doing in Afghanistan is of strategic importance to the UK ... We can hold the [Afghan] ring for [only] so long; following the elections early August making progress on things like security sector reform, rule of law, economic development, a re-integration of reformed insurgents – all critical to governance – is essential ... I do not think', he concluded, 'that the outcome is a foregone conclusion.'⁶³ Late in August 2009, General Richards said that it would be 'about 2014' before British troop numbers would decline. He reaffirmed, nonetheless, that the conflict 'was a war very much worth fighting for'.⁶⁴

Conversely, the top US general in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, then advised that 'The conflict will be won by persuading the population, not by destroying the enemy.'⁶⁵ In May 2009, allied US warplanes had dropped 2,000lb bombs on a suspected Taliban complex but killed a hundred civilians, eighty-six of whom were women and children.⁶⁶

In a report to the Pentagon, leaked on 22 September 2009, General McChrystal argued that there is no middle way. 'Success demands a comprehensive counter-insurgency campaign' aimed at winning support from the civilian Afghan population.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, according to the 5 October 2009 poll results, only 26 per cent of Americans were reported as supporting an increase in troop numbers.⁶⁸

In September 2009, the now overall commander of the British army, General Sir David Richards, had warned of the new weapons technology debate. He said, 'We cannot go back to operating as we might have done even ten years ago when it was still tanks, fast jets, and fleet escorts that dominated the doctrine of our three services.'⁶⁹ He noted that after some eight years of fighting in Afghanistan, the correct formula has not yet been found. His colleague, General Sir Graeme Lamb, appointed to talk to the Taliban, added, 'You can buy an

insurgency if you have enough money.’⁷⁰ This seems to offer one practical alternative to hot war and ought to be explored more fully. A week later, however, on 25 September 2009, Major General Andrew Mackay resigned from the army having commanded British troops in Afghanistan in 2007 and 2008. He complained of having to ‘make it up as we go along.’⁷¹ Both Brigadier General Ed Butler and Lieutenant Colonel Stuart Total commanded British troops in Afghanistan in 2007 and 2008. Both also resigned on the basis of a lack of direction, complaining that we are ‘making it up as we go along.’ They further complained of ‘the shoddy treatment’ of British troops.

From the foregoing evidence, there remains a consensus that the effective restructuring of the Afghan civil population and its society will take some thirty to forty years.

By November 2009, UK public opposition to the asymmetrical war in Afghanistan rose. In a poll commissioned by *The Independent on Sunday*, 70 per cent of those polled backed a withdrawal of forces within a year.⁷² Earlier that month, a senior British officer had advised that the active enemy army at any one time probably consisted of a mere 200 armed men who found virtue in their small numbers – four or five armed combatants at a time – because they were able to kill Allied troops here or there more or less at will, before disappearing into the wild and desolate countryside. Their modest active numbers were a strategic virtue. Late that autumn, it was revealed that the US army was paying the enemy Taliban hundreds of millions of dollars a year to protect US convoys of motorised trucks from Taliban attack.⁷³ The war itself was costed by John Kerry, chair of the US Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, at a staggering \$243 billion by the end of that October. Later, the Afghan war was judged to be a ‘huge risk’.

On 23 November 2009, the Chilcot Inquiry into how the UK had been drawn into illegal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, opened in London. Reporting on the ongoing inquiry, Richard Norton-Taylor reports that critically, in 2002, Lord Goldsmith, the British attorney general, advised that going to war to achieve regime change as an objective was unlawful and breached the UN charter.⁷⁴ Top UK commander Brigadier Bill Moore, in evidence to a post-war Ministry of Defence report, commented that the absence of advice from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Home Office, and the Department for International Development, ‘was appalling.’⁷⁵

Evidence given by Lieutenant General Frederick Viggers, the UK senior officer in Iraq in 2003, reported in *The Guardian* newspaper,⁷⁶ detailed what he described as the ‘amateur’ approach of the UK government’s administration. He complained of a ‘lack of a sense of direction in the UK government’. Through December 2009, evidence taken by the Commission was very critical of how the UK goes to war. The principal charge was that Britain had minimal influence over US diplomatic and military strategy, did not plan correctly for post-war conditions, and in respect of Iraq, utterly failed to understand the nature of its post-war society. General Viggers further advised that ‘We suffered from the lack of any real understanding of the state of that country post-invasion.’ Major General Tim Cross advised then prime minister Tony Blair that post-planning was ‘chaotic’.⁷⁷

As early as 2005, Prime Minister Blair had let it be known that he was privately/personally committed to toppling Saddam Hussein in Iraq, notwithstanding advice that regime change was/is never a justifiable cause for war.

On 24 November 2009, Human Rights Watch, using evidence drawn from the Pakistan

torturers themselves, advised that serious British complicity in the torture of terror suspects had been exposed by its researchers. The report noted that ‘UK complicity is clear ...’ and that the UK government was in a ‘legally, morally, and politically invidious position.’⁷⁸ International law, including the Convention Against Torture, obliges the UK government to investigate such charges.

For twenty-five years, many generals, top diplomats, judges and lawyers have been talking to those who would listen about the utter futility of using war as a tool of diplomacy. It is now timely to reflect on the consequences of their advice, remembering that all wars, by definition, are finite. It is also salutary to note that UN spending for its Department of Political Affairs increased in 2008–09 to about \$78 million compared to \$7 billion for its Department of Peacekeeping operations. Both, however, are a fraction of US military spending, which stood at \$600 billion for the same period.⁷⁹

Whilst the time-honoured, moral/pacifist arguments against war and violence as distinct from force are, for many, persuasive and adequate, the more pragmatic twenty-first century insight that modern war is now an outdated and inadequate tool, inherently incapable of producing the results required by politicians, is gaining widespread recognition, not least amongst the highest echelons of international military leadership.

On the 20 June 2010, the Chilcot Enquiry took evidence from Baroness Eliza Manningham-Buller, who had been head of M15 at the time of the invasion of Iraq. She said, ‘Very few would argue that the intelligence was substantial enough to make that decision [ie go to war].’ Asked by Sir Roderick Lyne, a member of the Enquiry, to what extent the conflict had exacerbated the threat from international terrorism facing the UK, she replied, ‘Substantially.’ A week later, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, when answering parliamentary questions about the Iraq war at the dispatch box, declared the invasion of Iraq had been ‘illegal’. He said, ‘We may have to wait for his [Labour Opposition Foreign Secretary Jack Straw] memoirs, but perhaps one day he will account for his role in the most disastrous decision of all: the illegal invasion of Iraq.’ Although the Speaker of the House subsequently ruled that as Deputy Prime Minister Mr Clegg ought not to have given his personal opinion when speaking at the Dispatch Box, many welcomed Clegg’s statement as wise and truthful.

Conclusion

It is evidently clear that war in the twenty-first century, as fought by or between democracies, simply does not work because it cannot work. It is no longer a reliable tool of diplomacy. It is, in that sense, redundant. Once that fundamental judgement is grasped then the alternatives, consistent with UN law and the evolution of international law – humanitarian law – can be better pursued. It is within the ability of nation states and their peoples to evolve conflict resolution without recourse to armed conflict. The distinction between ‘violence’ and ‘force’ is central to the argument. It follows that peaceful alternatives can and should be developed with renewed urgency leading to the peaceful, creative resolution of recurring diplomatic crises. In this process, the generals have an insightful leadership role to play. They should be heeded.

End Notes

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