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Thinking afresh about Deterrence, Containment and Intervention:
What relevance have these strategies as the world's geopolitics change?
How should best we analyse the past in order to learn profitably for the future?

Thank you Peter Starkey, and to you all, for the opportunity to contribute to your conference by giving the Ronnie Shephard Memorial Address. It is really a huge honour. I'm sorry I was not available to take part in your programme this week. I have heard you've had some very valuable presentations and interesting discussions, which I've missed.

I don't think I ever met Ronnie Shephard, but in my past career in the Army and more broadly within the British and NATO Defence establishment, I have worked closely alongside many members of the Operations Research and Operations Analysis community. I think it was a mutually profitable experience!

So it's a big pleasure to be here, and very kind of you to include my wife Sigi this evening. We most appreciate it.

As a military engineer, then operational planner and now military historian, I've always been keen on what the Germans succinctly call *Daten und Fakten* and what the Russians call the 'Science of War' [Наука войны] – in other words the rigorous underpinning of military theory and practice by scientific method.

The real value of this approach came home to me when working for General Rupert Smith during the First Gulf War, when we used some 'battlefield calculus' to support our tactical planning, be it estimating required march times, force ratios or artillery concentrations.

The idea that you can do without figures or calculations under the rubric 'art of war' is surely absurd. If you're going to commit men and women to war and battle, and ask them put their lives on the line, you owe it to them,

their families and the nations who have deployed them, to give them the best possible preparation and support. Give them the very best odds not only of surviving but also chance of winning in the widest sense. This is what a Military Covenant should reflect. It means not only getting the planning right, but also making sure that the thinking and learning is undertaken in the best possible manner – much easier said than done of course. I will argue that this is much a strategic issue as a technical one.

My very long title [Read Out] is a provocative one in so far that it suggests that we will require rethinking in the future about deterrence, containment and intervention, or any combination of the three; and as importantly, we need to take a careful look at the past in order to learn appropriate lessons for the future. I say this as we need to conduct 'analysis of operations' as much as 'operations analysis'. In my view, the latter supports the former.

My main contention is a familiar yet simple one: while tactics and technologies continue to evolve, and sometimes in a revolutionary manner, politics and strategy have more enduring qualities that we should observe and respect. We forget this at our peril.

Add Historical Quote?

So deterrence today against whom – containment of whom? Intervention whereto and wherein? How are geopolitics changing? Why, and how, should we conduct analysis of past operations to help inform if not guide future policy and strategy?

At first sight, if we might skip over intervention for a moment, the wording of my title with 'containment' and 'deterrence' might suggest a return to a former world order, which we had hoped had passed, as deterrence and containment were very much provided the logic, language and grammar of the Cold War.

But it useful here to pause for a moment, and to provide a brief historical perspective of that period.

Near the end of the Cold War, two highly experienced strategists from the United States made the following proposition:

> It is easy enough, when one considers the dangerously bipolar nature of world politics, the preoccupation of the superpowers with nuclear weapons, and the intensity of the arms race between them, … to conclude that the present age is not congenial to the kind of strategical principles elaborated by the masters of the past.

At the time of writing (in the mid 1980s) these commentators were concerned that they were experiencing an age without precedents, a 'situation most pronounced in the field of strategy'. What price, then, the teachings of Clausewitz and other 'makers of modern strategy', they wondered? They also pointed out that while the 'greatest of the Great Powers have avoided open war against each other', their 'involvement in regional disputes on behalf of client states has brought them dangerously close to it'.

When we look at the world today, then perhaps we are returning to a depressingly familiar situation, with some rather unpleasant similarities to both before the Second World War and in its immediate aftermath, right to the end of the Cold War. Despite our present familiarity and focus on COIN in Afghanistan, Great Power politics have not gone away. Far from it: we cannot really isolate Afghanistan from Pakistan, or indeed Pakistan from India, or in turn, India from China, or Afghanistan from Iran – I think you get my overly laborious point.

The repeated Chinese and Russian vetoes over Syria for example, should serve as a timely warning that the members of the UNSC P5 act in their own national interest first and foremost for all the talk of collective decision-making.

Although the brash ideology of the Cold War may have disappeared, and hopefully gone for good, some of the previous tensions between West and East remain, much as we would prefer to ignore them. And we are talking nowadays about related or residual problems in the Near, Middle and Far East, to use those old-fashioned terms. (I might add that these geographical descriptors from a Western European perspective are perhaps no longer valid!)

The reason is that geopolitics and geostrategy remain dominant and enduring concerns for Great Powers. It is in the diplomatic, military and economic DNA of China, Russia and the United States, and who knows, with a future Brazil. These powers have an instinct for domination, if not always by overt military means.

They act primarily in pursuit of their national *interests*, sometimes nakedly, most of the time more subtlety.

No amount of optimistic or wishful theorizing in Berlin, Paris or London about *values* can change the basic traditions, customs and habits between really Great Powers, or the manner in which they interact, often in a zero-sum manner. Furthermore, we must understand that our influence in Washington, Moscow and Peking is limited.

Why? The basic truth is that our grand strategic power, and hence political leverage, is limited despite Europe's economic strength, notwithstanding the Euro crisis. Without the United States, our real applicable military strength (that which can be deployed and employed) in NATO is comparatively weak.

To think otherwise – on the vain hope that Europe can rewrite the rules – is surely delusional and self-defeating. Some may think this an excessively cynical if not amoral view. But the United Kingdom and France should have learnt that lesson in Suez, nearly 60 years ago.

Apparent success in Libya last year cannot necessarily be translated into solving other, more complex and inherently intractable, problems in the region. The Arab Spring is now over a year and a half old, and is looking pretty tired. We watch helpless on the sidelines of Syria, and await the ticking clock of Iran.

Furthermore, as the term geopolitics suggests, we need to look at geography and the politics of regions rather than those of individual countries, but at the same time not forget the enduring power and influence of Great Powers on such countries. Let me explain this paradox.

At the risk of gross simplification, when we look at recent conflicts or crises today, we tend to characterize them over-simply by the names of the principal countries involved. Take Iraq or Afghanistan, for example, or Libya and Syria, or Iran. We tend to look predominantly at the *internal* factors at play in the countries involved, but often in so doing we overlook the *external* ones and the contribution, malign or otherwise, of big power politics, and the indirect but discreetly applied power behind the scenes.

Just as there is an essential link between policy and strategy, there is an equivalent one between geopolitics and geostrategy. The British military thinker Frederick Maurice, writing in the 1920s, compared the relationship between politics and strategy to that between a parent and a child:

> It is the duty of policy to choose the road for strategy, to set it on its way, to provide means sufficient for the journey, to give timely counsel, to watch the youngster's progress carefully, to be prompt to give a hand should he stumble, to be ready to turn him in a new direction should a change of course seem necessary or opportune, but to resist the temptation to interfere save as a measure of real emergency, and then to make interference as little obvious as may be. It is no easy task to be a wise parent.

By extension, we should be careful in separating geopolitics and geostrategy. They are, after all, in the same family of human affairs.

So what kind of strategies can be employed at a time of changing geopolitics? In large measure power is shifting East, with China's economic advance no longer taking everyone by surprise. Its armed forces are witnessing great growth. Japan and Taiwan and other countries of the region are feeling threatened. In response, the focus of the United States strategic planning is switching from Europe and the Middle East (excepting Iran) to the Far East.

Within three years (or perhaps shorter than that) we will be leaving Afghanistan, and the world will look quite different. The joker in the current pack is Iran, and some analysts predict a disaster this year or next when Israel finally loses patience. The Phoney War is over, or will be soon. New jokers may come along or old ones return, whether from Europe, Asia or Latin America.

So what strategies will be relevant in such circumstances? Deterrence and self-interest may continue to prevent war between Great Powers, but as the history of the world since 1945 shows, conflicts unfortunately will continue to flourish. They will continue to manifest itself in many forms, in both intra- and inter-state varieties. As the pressures on global resources continue to grow, whether water, food or fuel, there is a concomitant rising threat to peace, prosperity and stability.

So what about containment? Its doctrinal father was George Frost Kennan, who argued in his famous 'Long Telegram' from Moscow in 1946 that an expansionist Soviet Union had to be contained in areas of vital national interest to the United States.

This view subsequently led to the enduring US and NATO geopolitics of the Cold War. If Churchill had highlighted the Iron Curtain in his famous Fulton Missouri speech of the same year, identified with the start of the Cold War, it was Kennan who provided much of its intellectual substance on its

rationale. Ironically, he went on to consider that the Truman and subsequent administrations had misinterpreted if not abused his thinking. [Ladies and Gentlemen, he lived to the ripe old age of 101, so he must have slept calmly in his bed at night.]

Do we need a new Kennan and a new geopolicy of containment today? How would it apply, for instance, in Iran? This is a difficult matter to address in a few minutes, but one needs, to use the words of Wellington and Liddell Hart, to look first at the 'other side of the hill'.

What are the motives behind Iran's alleged quest to obtain nuclear weapons? In which directions is it seeking to extend its power in the region, and to what ends? What do we really know about their capabilities, let alone their strategic ideas and intentions, given the right opportunities?

I cannot answer these questions here, but they do need to be asked by the right people in the right closed rooms. Somewhere there is a line to be drawn between ignoring or minimizing a potential threat that has yet to manifest itself, perhaps because we cannot deal with it, or afford to deal with it, and exaggerating one in order to justify the threat's removal. Some of you may be thinking I'm alluding here to a specific strategic situation in 2003, but I'm making a more general point.

Containment seeks to deny physical expansion or power projection, whether direct or indirect; it rests on other geopolitics and geo-strategies. It requires deterrence and a demonstrable ability to support friends and allies in opposing hostile expansion or threatening behaviour.

It is an active rather than a passive policy. It requires political, diplomatic, military and economic wherewithal. In other words, containment needs all instruments of power to be applied adroitly – it is a broad grand strategic doctrine rather than a narrow military strategic one.

That is why containment has many faces, but few friends in the treasuries of the world. It costs a hell of a lot of time, effort and money. And in today's world, we need to think very carefully about *what we can afford*, and equally, *what we cannot afford to be without*.

[As an aside, I cannot understand why a maritime power such as the United Kingdom can do without a persistent airborne maritime surveillance capability. I have seen a lot of evidence on this subject and the argument that we can live safely – in other words be secure – without one just doesn't stack up.]

Deterrence, whether nuclear or conventional, doesn't come cheaply either. It is a fallacy to believe that deterrence can be run solely on an economy of effort basis. You need a broad mix of capabilities that provide a demonstrable ability to act or respond if required in a manner that will make a potential opponent think very carefully about using or even threatening force against you.

The danger is that we cannot easily scale down what we had in the Cold War and think that will provide us with adequate security on a simplistic 'reduced risk, reduced insurance premium basis'. Nor is purely defensive retrenchment necessarily the answer, as the threats may visit you unexpectedly. As the threats and risks have changed, we need to change the way we generate military and other capabilities appropriate to the uncertain and unstable world we face, not the stable and predictable world we would prefer to deal with.

But, coming back to maritime surveillance, if you drop essential links in the chain of your capability to observe, orient, decide and act, your overall ability to deter may be put at risk. And you might not even see the next threat appearing, let alone deal with it.

It's a fallacy when thinking about containment and deterrence to think that you don't need to intervene anymore – these are complementary and not contradictory strategies. Interventions, however, risk being self-defeating if they become so constraining that containment or deterrence is seriously undermined elsewhere.

Strategic balance is derived from an ability to switch focus and effort from one theatre to another, while retaining or reconstituting a reserve, drawing on existing resources or generating new ones to meet new requirements.

We also need other types of strategies to assist us, which brings me to the close relations of containment and deterrence – *assurance* and *reassurance*:

Assurance to neutrals and potential friends;

Reassurance to existing friends and allies that hostile threats will be matched, countered and, if necessary, neutralised.

In such circumstances, alliances provide very useful glue to bond nations together, the more patent the external threat, the more latent potential of the alliance to hold together. The historical origins and founding rationale of NATO in 1949 are clear: less obvious now is how this particular alliance can provide a common front in meeting some of today's threats, particularly if there is no common agreement as to their acuteness. I think we will see the growth of variable coalitions within semi-fixed alliances.

Today we provide assurance and reassurance through policies and strategies of engagement, through old-fashioned diplomacy, backed up by trade and economic co-operation and through Defence diplomacy. Flying the flag in foreign seas is doing just that, as is providing military training and advisory teams in countries across the world.

Meanwhile, our potential enemies will try to assure us that they pose no threat whatsoever. That is why diplomacy remains important to keep open the channels of communication both ways. Diplomacy without a military element is pretty hollow. Hence in my view Defence Diplomacy is not a piece of tautology, but one of reality, which in turn needs to be properly resourced.

In the meantime, we need to return some basic theory and revisit the masters of strategy to learn with profit from the past. This brings me to my final point: the need for *Strategic Analysis of Operations in a scientific manner*, not as some arcane educational exercise but as an essential input that informs future policy and strategy making.

I hope here I'm not going to cause any offence here because I don't think we in the United Kingdom are very good at this. We have very little capacity let alone inclination to write histories of past campaigns or conflicts – as if everything in the future will be different.

Are there not lessons to be drawn from the planning of interventions, for example, comparing assumptions made with realities? Where are we gathering the necessary data – the facts and figures – that provide the basis for analysis? And even if we are undertaking this work, which I doubt we are, is it being done on a necessarily comprehensive and statistically relevant basis? And if the work is eventually done, which can only come if there is sufficient political will, will it be accorded the appropriate weight in future deliberations and decision-making?

This is where I appeal to the Operations Research and Operations Analysis community – you need in my view to press harder on this issue – not just complete bespoke pieces of historical analysis that are but pixels on the strategic images that need to be gathered.

Our nations need not just the strategic intelligence to mount operations if necessary, but as much the necessary evidential data to inform how best this should be done, based on past experience in an enlightened manner.

The cry that every situation is different, and history is bunk, just doesn't hold. Every competent, internationally recognized profession is a 'learning' one: the profession of arms can be no exception. The science and technology has a duty to support better learning, whether in the deployed formation headquarters, the Service Commands, in Ministries of Defence and not least in Defence Academies.

It has been a privilege to speak to you this evening. Thank you for your attention.