

Chief the General Staff Speech at RUSI Land Warfare Conference

I stand here as the first Chief of the General Staff since 1941 to take up this position in the shadow of a major state on state land war in Europe. As I do, I'm reminded of the words of a man in whose footsteps I tread. In relative obscurity, and recognising the impending danger the nation faced, the then Brigadier Bernard Montgomery wrote this in the pages of that magnificent publication Royal Engineers' Journal of 1937:

We have got to develop new methods, and learn a new technique...
There is no need to continue doing a thing merely because it has been done in the Army for the last thirty or forty years – if this is the only reason for doing it, then it is high time we changed and did something else.

For us, today, that “something else” is mobilising the Army to meet the new threat we face: a clear and present danger that was realised on 24th February when Russia used force to seize territory from Ukraine, a friend of the United Kingdom. But let me be clear, the British Army is not mobilising to provoke war – it is mobilising to prevent war.

The scale of the war in Ukraine is unprecedented. 103 Battalion Tactical Groups committed. Up to 33,000 Russians dead, wounded, missing or captured. A casualty rate of up to 200 per day amongst the Ukrainian defenders. 77,000 square kilometres of territory seized – 43% of the total landmass of the Baltic states. Ammunition expenditure rates that would exhaust the combined stockpiles of several NATO countries in a matter of days. The deliberate targeting of civilians with 4,700 civilian dead. 8 million refugees. For us, the visceral nature of a European land war is not just some manifestation of distant storm clouds on the horizon; we can see it now.

In all my years in uniform, I haven't known such a clear threat to the principles of sovereignty and democracy, and the freedom to live without fear of violence, as the brutal aggression of President Putin and his expansionist ambitions. I believe we are living through a period in history as profound as the one that our forebears did over 80 years ago. Now, as then, our choices will have a disproportionate effect on our future.

This is our 1937 moment. We are not at war – but we must act rapidly so that we aren't drawn into one through a failure to contain territorial expansion. So surely it is beholden on each of us to ensure that we never find ourselves asking that futile question – should we have done more? I will do everything in my power to ensure that the British Army plays its part in averting war; I will have an answer to my grandchildren should they ever ask what I did in 2022.

We have agency to prevent war now. But only if we take a new approach.

These are extraordinary times. So I will not take the usual approach of a new CGS to this event. It will not be the traditional tour of the horizon covering the full breadth of Army business. I will concentrate on one area alone – how I intend to mobilise the British Army – our Regulars, Reservists and Civilians – to deter Russian aggression. To prevent war.

We are already a busy Army. But today is about mobilisation, and to mobilise effectively we will need to suppress our additive culture and guard against the 'tyranny of and' – we can't do everything well and some things are going to have to stop; it will mean ruthless prioritisation.

From now the Army will have a singular focus – to mobilise to meet today's threat and thereby prevent war in Europe.

This is not the rush to war at the speed of the railway time tables of 1914. It is instead an acceleration of the most important parts of Future Soldier's bold modernisation agenda, a move to a positional strategy, an increased focus on readiness and combined arms training and a broader institutional renewal that creates the culture required to win if called upon. This process, given a name Operation MOBILISE, will be the Army's primary focus over the coming years.

So why do we need to mobilise?

Under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Defence Secretary, the United Kingdom has risen to meet Moscow's aggression. Defence has worked at a phenomenal pace to bring together a coalition of partners to provide materiel, intelligence and training to sustain Ukraine in its fight against the Russian invaders. Our bi-lateral relationship with Kyiv has gone from strength to strength; this year alone we have supplied 9500 anti-tank missiles, of which over 5000 were NLAW. We have already provided UK-based training for 650 AFU soldiers, and in the coming months, the British Army will deliver battle-winning skills to a further 10,000. It's just started.

The upcoming Madrid Summit is a timely opportunity to demonstrate our leadership in NATO and our enduring commitment to our allies. Mobilising the Army to prevent war is as tangible and concrete an act of leadership as I can offer – the UK will lead by example.

It is dangerous to assume that Ukraine is a limited conflict; one of its obvious lessons is that Putin's calculations do not always follow our logic. It's also worth remembering that historically, Russia often starts wars badly. And because Russia wages war at the strategic, not the tactical level – its depth and resilience means it can suffer any number of campaigns, battles and engagements lost, regenerate and still ultimately prevail. History has also shown us that armies that have tasted defeat learn more quickly. While Russia's conventional capability will be much reduced – for a time, at least – Putin's declared intent recently to restore the lands of 'historic Russia' makes any respite temporary and the threat will become even more acute. We don't yet know how the war in Ukraine will end, but in most

scenarios, Russia will be an even greater threat to European security after Ukraine than it was before. The Russian invasion has reminded us of the time-honoured maxim that if you want to avert conflict, you better be prepared to fight.

So this is the challenge that I will address through mobilisation. And to make it crystal clear – This means focusing on winning the war, working with these allies, against this threat and in this location. And we will see the first orders issued in Madrid tomorrow.

This threat has also materialised at a time when the world is already looking less secure – the viewpoint set out clearly in last year's Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper. In meeting a revanchist Russia, we cannot be guilty of myopically chasing the ball. Defence cannot ignore the exponential rise and chronic challenge of China, not just within the South China Sea but through its sub-threshold activities across the globe. Beijing will be watching our response to Moscow's actions carefully. But ceding more territory to Putin could prove a fatal blow to the principle of national sovereignty that has underpinned the international order since 1945. And we can't allow NATO states to live with the grim reality of the human cost of occupation that we see in front of us.

Given the commitments of the US in Asia during the 20s and 30s, I believe that the burden for conventional deterrence in Europe will fall increasingly to European members of NATO and the JEF. This is right in my view: taking up the burden in Europe means we can free more US resources to ensure that our values and interests are protected in the Indo-Pacific

And we are not alone in facing this new reality. Looking out at you here today I am reassured by the number of allies and partners I see before me. The faces of friends from previous campaigns where we have shared hardship and laughter, failures and victories. We have shed blood together. We remember those we left behind. And it is our willingness to shed blood to protect our common values and each other's territory that will see us prevail.

So, how are we going to mobilise?

Article V remains the cornerstone of our national security; that makes it a critical national interest. The conflict in Ukraine will herald I think a paradigm shift in how NATO delivers collective deterrence; from a doctrine of reacting to crises, to one of deterring them. This principle is at the heart of Op MOBILISE: Russia knowing that they cannot gain a quick localised victory – that in any circumstances and any time frame they will lose if they pick a fight with NATO.

Deterrence demands all of the tools of statecraft, underpinned by soldiers, sailors, aviators and Civil Servants operating across all five operational domains. It requires forces across Defence that are modernised, relevant, and harness the potential of the fourth industrial revolution. Effective deterrence also means communicating clearly so we maximise deterrent effect without increasing the risk of mobilisation.

When faced with an adversary such as Mr Putin, with the campaigns of Peter the Great as his reference point, the war in Ukraine also reminds us of the utility of Land Power: it takes an army to hold and regain territory and defend the people who live there. It takes an Army to deter. And this army, the British Army, will play its part alongside our allies.

In Ukraine we've seen the limitations of deterrence by punishment. It has reinforced the importance of deterrence through denial – we must stop Russia seizing territory – rather than expecting to respond to a land grab with a delayed counteroffensive.

To succeed, the British Army, in conjunction with our NATO allies and partners, must be in-place or at especially high readiness – ideally a mix of both. Tripwires aren't enough. If we fail to deter, there are no good choices given the cost of a potential counterattack and the associated nuclear threat. We must, therefore, meet strength with strength from the outset and be unequivocally prepared to fight for NATO territory.

If this battle came, we would likely be outnumbered at the point of attack and fighting like hell. Standoff air, maritime or cyber fires are unlikely to dominate on their own – Land will still be the decisive domain. And though I bow to no one in my advocacy for the need for game changing digital transformation, to put it bluntly, you can't cyber your way across a river. No single platform, capability, or tactic will unlock the problem.

Success will be determined by combined arms and multi-domain competence. And mass. Ukraine has also shown that engaging with our adversaries and training, assisting and reassuring our partners is high payoff activity. Future Soldier's new Ranger Regiment – on the ground in Ukraine before the invasion – and the new Security Force Assistance Brigade are well set for this. With the right partner and in the right conditions persistent engagement and capacity building can be really effective. Operation ORBITAL has made a key contribution to preparing the Armed Forces of Ukraine for this fight and it continues to expand exponentially. And We must be wary of Russia's malign activities further afield – our global hubs, including Kenya and Oman, will still play a vital role as we seek to mobilise to meet aggression in Europe – allowing us to help our partners there secure strategic advantage elsewhere in the world.

This is the war that we are mobilising to prevent, by preparing to win. With our NATO and JEF partners. Against the Russian threat. In Eastern and Northern Europe. And in doing so it is my hope that we never have to fight it.

So what does this mean for the Army...

My predecessor, and my friend, General Sir Mark Carleton-Smith, laid the foundations for the most ambitious transformation of the British Army in a generation, Future Soldier. We, I owe him a great debt. The Government has also generously committed 41 billion pounds to Army equipment over the next decade.

But as we face a new reality, a race to mobilise, we must be honest with ourselves about Future Soldiers' timelines, capability gaps and risks – and now our own diminished stockpiles as a result of Gifting in Kind to the brave soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. We should not be afraid of necessary heresies. Defence is only as strong as its weakest domain. And technology does not eliminate the relevance of combat mass.

To mobilise the Army I intend to drive activity across four focused lines of effort:

First, and most importantly, boosting readiness. NATO needs highly ready forces that can deploy at short notice for the collective defence of alliance members. Deterring Russia means more of the Army ready more of the time, and ready for high-intensity war in Europe. So we will pick up the pace of combined arms training, and major on urban combat. We will re-build our stockpiles and review the deployability of our vehicle fleet. And having seen its limitations first-hand as the Commander of the Field Army, I think we need to ask ourselves whether Whole Fleet Management is the right model given the scale of the threat we face. The time has come to be frank about our ability to fight if called upon.

Second, we will accelerate the modernisation outlined in Future Soldier. NATO needs technologically advanced modern armies able to deploy at speed and fight together. They must be able to integrate effects across the domains, all stitched together by a sophisticated and robust command, control and communication network. We will seek to speed up the delivery of planned new equipments including long range fires, attack aviation, persistent surveillance and target acquisition, expeditionary logistic enablers, Ground Based Air Defence, protected mobility, and the technologies that will prove pivotal to our digital ambition: CIS and Electronic Warfare. Most importantly, this will start now – not at some ill-defined point in the future.

Third, we will re-think how we fight. We've been watching the war in Ukraine closely and we are already learning and adapting. Not least to the help of RUSI, Many of the lessons are not new – but they are now applied. We will double-down on combined arms manoeuvre, especially in the deep battle, and devise a new doctrine rooted in geography, integrated with NATO's war plans and specific enough to drive focused, relevant investment and inspire the imagination of our people to fight and win if called upon.

And Fourth, I am prepared to look again at the structure of our Army. If we judge that revised structures will make the Army better prepared to fight in Europe, then we will follow Monty's advice and do "something else". Now of course adapting structures has implications for the size of the Army – and I know that there will be questions on Army numbers locked, loaded and ready to fire from the audience! Put simply, the threat has changed and as the threat changes, we will change with it. My job is to build the best Army possible, ready to integrate with fellow Services and Strategic command and ready to fight alongside our allies. Obviously our Army has to be affordable; nonetheless, it would be perverse if the CGS was advocating reducing the size of the Army as a land war rages in Europe and Putin's territorial ambitions

extend into the rest of the decade, and beyond Ukraine.

Importantly, the four mechanisms I have used to illustrate how the Army will mobilise will all be initiated from the line of march. This means now rather than in some distant and ill-defined point in the future.

Op MOBILISE is as much about people as it is about training and hardware. The last 125 days of conflict in Ukraine have shown us if we needed showing the enduring nature of war; its violent and human nature, and its timeless interplay of friction and chance. It has reminded us all that war fundamentally remains a clash of wills. Russia's so called 'Special Military Operation' has shown that while Moscow may have invested in some of the most modernised land technology in the world, it lacked the will to fight when faced with a tenacious Ukrainian defence. Let down by its leaders, we have seen the moral decay of the Russian Army play out in front of us.

The fighting spirit of our people is the Army's single greatest responsibility. The moral component matters. To succeed in mobilising we must ensure that we engender the culture and behaviour required to forge and cohere a confident and winning team, and, in my 37 years' experience, I have learnt that trust increases tempo. I am fully behind the TEAMWORK initiative set up by my predecessor. It is not woke-ism nor in any way a lessening of standards at a time where the British Army must be prepared to engage in warfare at its most violent. To put it simply, you don't need to be laddish to be lethal – in a scrap you have to truly trust those on your left and right.

And when the British Army has been faced with any challenge during its long history, it has always been the ingenuity of our people that has seen us through. I know there will be an opportunity cost to mobilising – and we must continually review and balance our priorities to meet emerging threats. But mobilisation also requires us to cut down that which slows us down. I want to you all, I'm talking to the Army here to identify those areas of our process and bureaucracy that take up your time – like any public institution we have accumulated some barnacles that slow us down – but we are not just any institution, so it's time to strip them back.

Mobilisation is not just an internal focus. We must take industry with us and have the right relationships with our enabling agents to deliver and quicken the ambitious modernisation targets we have set ourselves. I will use the next few months to engage personally with you, our industry partners and encourage you to use the framework offered by the new Land Industrial Strategy to make the Army more lethal and more effective, with better equipment in the hands of our soldiers at best speed. We can't be lighting the factory furnaces across the nation on the eve of war; this effort must start now if we want to prevent war from happening.

I'd be naïve if I ignored the fact that the Army's platform procurement has not been a smooth journey during the last decade. We have the humility to learn the lessons from where it has gone wrong and the confidence to engage with industry to generate the mutual trust required to get the very latest technology for the best value for money. And we should also be bolder in

celebrating our successes – AH64 Echo is flying now, the first Boxer will be in service in 2023, the first Challenger 3 arrives in 2024 ‘and the Sky Sabre air defence system was deployed and operating in Poland only weeks after entering service.

This speech forms my first order of the day. Mobilisation is now the main effort. We are mobilising the Army to help prevent war in Europe by being ready to fight and win alongside our NATO allies and partners. It will be hard work – a generational effort – and I expect all ranks to get ready, train hard and engage. We must be practical and cut through unnecessary bureaucracy, be prepared to deprioritise where activity is not mission critical, honestly highlight risks where we identify them and avoid falling victim to the say-do gap or the lure of institutional panaceas – conscious of the advice of the late, great, John Le Carre that Whitehall panaceas often simply go ‘out with a whimper, leaving behind...the familiar English muddle’.

I expect this change to be command led. And that includes all commanders: from the General in Main Building, to the young Lance Corporal in the barrack room, from the reservist officer on a weekend exercise, to the Civil Servant in Army Headquarters.

And as we mobilise, I echo the words of General Montgomery to his team in the dust of the North African desert in 1942, “we must have confidence in one another”...

As the new CGS I have confidence in each and every one of you. And I am proud to stand among you.

And my final message to you is this:

This is the moment to defend the democratic values that define us;

This is the moment to help our brave Ukrainian allies in their gallant struggle;

This is the moment we stand with our friends and partners to maintain peace throughout the rest of Europe.

This is our moment. Seize it.