



## Transcript

# Unity of Purpose in Hybrid Conflict: Managing the Civilian/Military Disconnect and 'Operationalizing' the Comprehensive Approach

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## **Lieutenant General Sir Richard Shirreff:**

The challenge we face, and have faced in almost every operation we have seen in the last 20 years, is how to achieve the unity of purpose so essential if our efforts are to be properly directed. In addressing this problem I am not going to claim any power of alchemy. But what I can say is that the work we in the ARRC have done, together with our non-military partners, is going some way to offering the solutions we need. So I'll talk about what we face on the battlefield and are likely to face in future; the nature of command and control and how we need to adjust it and look too at the challenges we face in 'operationalising' the comprehensive approach, while still recognising the inescapable fact that we still need to be able to fight.

For what we see now on the battlefield is a situation in which our enemies, whether state sponsored or non-state actors (or both) are using a range of irregular or asymmetric techniques and capabilities to exploit our vulnerabilities. Of course, there is little new about asymmetric warfare – as Rudyard Kipling said: 'The odds are on the cheaper man'.

So rather than a neat linear spectrum of conflict with state on state war fighting at one end and peace keeping at the other, what we see today, and are likely to continue to see in future, is a kaleidoscope in which conventional and irregular war fighting, together with terrorism, insurgency and criminal activity is all part of a dynamic and hybrid combination, hence the shorthand term 'hybrid conflict'.

This amounts to a combination of 'high tech' combat operations, and more protracted stabilisation operations, in some cases involving fighting of an intensity not seen for 60 years. It is enduring, physically and psychologically relentless and fought under intense media scrutiny – from the media and from information hungry and well connected populations.

And there are common themes: operations are multinational; political support from domestic populations has been in short supply; national policies and understanding of operations undertaken have diverged, so diluting international effort. We have been operating on another sovereign nation's territory so that nation's political agendas or whims have been the driver. We have not had a clear or consistent view of the agreed end state and how we intend to get there either internationally or regionally. We have not had the sophisticated understanding of local dynamics and culture that we might have liked or needed. We have made unrealistic assumptions about the ease with which adequate security could be achieved and security has been as

dependent on reconstruction, development and governance as on the application of purely military force. Precision and proportionality have been key and legally essential; and the development of competent indigenous local army and police has quickly become axiomatic to success.

And I would suggest that this complex hybrid kaleidoscope we see today in Afghanistan, and have seen in Iraq is likely to remain the defining characteristic of warfare, even in state on state conflict. So Iraq and Afghanistan are not aberrations but represent the future and the present, as did Lebanon 2006 and Georgia 2008. To quote General James Mattis, Commander United States Joint Forces Command: 'simply put, much of what we see in the cities of Iraq, the mountains of Afghanistan, and the foothills of southern Lebanon, I believe we will see again in the future.'

And because such operations take place amid the clutter of the land environment, in areas and amongst populations of great developmental need, the minds of the people amongst whom we operate become the vital ground. So we need to subject all our operations to one over-riding criterion: what impact is this operation likely to have on the minds of the people? Securing the minds and support of the people among whom we operate is therefore the key activity. If, by the way we conduct our operations, we alienate them; we gift the advantage to our adversaries. Protection of the people means people-centric campaign design.

So if future conflict is, as is present conflict, hybrid and among the people, what are the implications for the way we fight? First is the imperative of getting command right, without which failure is guaranteed. On the face of it, the essence of military command and control is timeless. It is about getting the right capability to the right place at the right time to deliver the right effect. This means understanding the problem, mission and constraints; planning, resourcing, directing and executing - and aiming off for the unexpected. It also means having the endurance, the will, and the resources to last the course whatever the siren voices urging us to stop. So not only does this require clarity of strategic direction, but at the theatre and tactical level it means getting the operational design right and executing that design.

What has changed is that this is now a joint civil/military venture, top to bottom. What we are faced with now demands a different approach to command and control at all levels of war. Hybrid conflict means we need hybrid solutions.

Hence the importance of putting influence at the heart of our operational design: whom do we want to influence and how do we communicate that influence? What is the relative influence effect of kinetic operations or non-kinetic operations and how should they be synchronised and sequenced? This means the right philosophy of command and control. It also means, rather more prosaically, money - a weapon system in its own right, and spending it wisely depends on true integration of military and civil planning.

Fundamental to influence is the relationship between mass, presence and precision: mass to provide the boots on the ground, presence to protect the people and to secure the necessary reconstruction and development. And precision because when we strike we cannot afford the collateral damage which alienates the people.

There can be no purely military solutions in this complex hybrid world; security cannot be achieved solely through the application of military force. Military force may be a key part of delivering security, but security is just as dependent on good governance, adequately trained and relatively incorrupt indigenous security forces, both army and police and on reconstruction and economic development. So success depends on the closest possible integration between the military and the non-military actors on the stage if unity of purpose is to be achieved. And unity of purpose depends on the right command and control. To adapt General Omar Bradley's aphorism: 'amateurs talk tactics, professionals talk logistics' and to quote my predecessor as COMARRC, General Sir David Richards: 'amateurs talk tactics, professionals talk logistics and command and control.' And as Paddy Ashdown has said, the one principle which drives everything is: 'what we can do alone is not as important as what we can do together.'

It starts at the strategic level, with international and regional agreement, however limited, on the political end state, together with strong leadership from a big beast international coordinator with the political authority to pull things together in country between key players: indigenous government (on whom certain conditions must be laid and to whom no blank cheque given), civilian agencies and the military. Strategic design must take account of hybridity and uncertainty.

At the operational or theatre level, it is for the theatre commander to determine the operational leaps along the path set by strategy and for subordinate tactical commanders to execute the tactical steps required. This means a nested hierarchy of headquarters with clear and separate functions. The theatre headquarters must be joint and capable of designing, resourcing

and executing the campaign. However, it cannot do this alone and must reach outwards regionally and internally to the indigenous government and integrate efforts with civilian agencies. Hybrid conflict needs hybrid partnerships.

At the tactical level, it is the task of a land component headquarters well versed in the art and science of designing those tactical steps to provide the support, leadership and clarity of intent to subordinate formations in order to tee them up to achieve success. Minimizing national caveats requires a headquarters with multinationality deep in its DNA, ethos and training capable of achieving genuine buy in from all contributing nations.

Axiomatic at every level is the requirement for joint effort between land, sea and air because the application of military force, particularly in the land environment requires support from air and often maritime forces. This means the closest integration of maritime and air planning into land operations. It is not good enough for land planners to produce a plan in isolation and expect it to be blessed and initiated by air or maritime forces, so to avoid this air and maritime planners must be integrated within a land component headquarters from the initial conception of a plan, through its refinement and synchronisation to ultimate execution. There will still be a requirement for single service components for specific operations, for example a maritime component in an anti-piracy or embargo operation or the air component policing a no-fly zone. However, where decisive effect is required, almost invariably in the land environment, the land component commander owns the consequences of operations because of their impact on the minds of the people. He must therefore be the supported commander.

Equally axiomatic is multi-nationality because even the most powerful nation requires the political authority conferred by international support for an operation. And effective multinational command and control needs to be worked for. It requires the right people, ethos and training. The commander on the ground has to balance national, multinational and coalition intent and appreciate that different nations think differently. Above all, he cannot allow any member of a coalition to be unsuccessful if the strategic purpose of a coalition is not to be lost.

This means careful tasking, taking good account of individual national contingent strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, goodwill, mutual understanding, patience, rapport, sensitivity and above all trust are essential and can generate the freedom to overcome national constraints and cement relationships. Clearly there remain challenges in terms of language, national caveats and limitations on capabilities. However, the advantages of a

coalition outweigh the disadvantages in terms of campaign authority and international buy in to the operational design.

A well-established, credible land component headquarters built on strong foundations of multinationality, operational experience, and rigorous training led by a framework nation with strong and capable contributions - from as many other partner nations from within the NATO alliance as possible - is certainly preferable to an ad hoc creation based on individual augmentees from across a coalition with no strong spine of collective ethos, training or experience. Preferable also to one based largely on one dominant nation with little feel for multinationality.

Quite simply, without strong, operationally proven and capable multinational command and control it is difficult to see how the national fiefdoms and cantonments fighting the largely tactical battle so prevalent in Iraq and Afghanistan can be welded together into a coherent theatre level operational design. The key is to build on well proven and capable multinational capabilities.

In addition to multinationality and integration of joint actions, there are four other things it must get right if a headquarters is to be optimised for hybrid conflict. First, it must understand the problem culturally, historically and politically – perhaps through the establishment of a commander's initiative group to think laterally, challenge, advise and influence (and I can assure you that with four free thinking academics – including Paul Cornish, my CIG in the ARRC does just that). Without this understanding it is difficult to derive the right tools, structures and proficiencies required.

Next, it must put influence at the heart of its design and execution of operations which means getting the narrative right from the strategic down to the tactical level, hence the critical importance of strategic communications. Third, in order to 'operationalise' the comprehensive approach, it must have the philosophy and structures to be able to conduct integrated planning and execution with both joint and non-military partners. Last, assistance to indigenous security forces must be fundamental to its operational design and execution.

This though is easier said than done. So let me talk about the ARRC's experience - though I preface what I say by stressing that what we have done has only been experimental. We have tested our structures on exercise but they have not yet been subjected to ultimate test of operations.

On the positive side I believe we have established a unique capability for planning and executing complex integrated operations with other key civilian

agencies and that ARRCAD E FUSION, the exercise we conducted last November, helped validate the structural and other changes we have made within the headquarters better to achieve unity of purpose with non-military players. And here I pay tribute to the FCO, DFID and the stabilisation unit, together with the Netherlands Foreign Service and the US State Department who gave unprecedented support to our efforts.

However, I am also very conscious that we have a long way to go. First we must change the culture within military organisations. We must not assume we know all the answers and above all, we must communicate in a language that our partners can understand.

Next we need to recognise the different decision-action cycles of the military, the political/diplomatic and the developmental/reconstruction players - and I'm grateful to Paul Cornish for these observations. The reality is that the decision-action cycle of a military headquarters is tighter, faster, more efficient - but more short-term - than both the political/diplomatic decision-action cycle which sets the context in which the military operate and must therefore serve and the developmental aid and reconstruction decision/action cycle which will ensure the long-term and durable success of the mission.

So, we get a disconnect between the strategic, operational and tactical, precisely at the point at which a close and functioning connection is required and expected. We need to look for innovative ways to manage hybrid decision making and recognise that traditional planning tools are not best suited to managing this disconnect.

I am also grateful to Paul Currion whose experience and expertise as a humanitarian advisor added much value to ARRCAD E FUSION for his observation that the demands of 21st century hybrid conflict mean that how we engage with our friends is as pressing a concern as how we deal with our enemies. Current coin doctrine goes some way towards dealing with this in terms of engaging individuals and groups living in affected areas, but there has been less effort on dealing with individuals and groups working in those areas. The assumption of shared goals is not a sufficient basis on which to build such relationships, since the different action-decision cycles meant that any such goal is likely to be unrealistic.

To deliver real cooperation in this respect requires a change in how the military frame the problem. Military action is based largely on denying or degrading the options available to the enemy, but civil-military cooperation and the need to be people centric must be based on the reverse – it needs to

be based upon opening up the options available to civilians, not just the beneficiary communities but also allies such as UN agencies or NGOs.

Instead of thinking of a battle space shared with the enemy, we should consider a problem space shared both with the enemy and a wider range of actors. Instead of approaching the problem space in terms of what can we the military do, we need to ask the question: 'what needs to be done?' And you cannot begin to understand this question until you understand the problem – and trying to understand it when you deploy is almost invariably too late.

But none of this means that we do not still need to fight and it is a fact that fundamental military tactics, techniques and procedures, just as relevant in hybrid conflict, together with the operational art to give them purpose, have been lost. For example at brigade and divisional level, march drills, movement and deliberate obstacle crossing, once core business are lost techniques because they remain unpractised. A combination of the post-Cold War peace dividend, long years of peace support operations in the Balkans and the recent focus on stabilization operations in Iraq and Afghanistan has resulted in the loss of a capability for major combat operations at divisional level.

While this is, most emphatically, not a call for a return to Cold War style mass manoeuvre, the fact remains that certain tactical techniques in major combat operations will continue to remain relevant in 21st century warfare. Thus, as the Chief of the General Staff said here at Chatham House, 'whether one is fighting non-state actors in Afghanistan or proxies sponsored by a disgruntled major power there or somewhere else, the skill sets and weapon systems required will look usefully similar....a virtuous congruence between non-state and inter-state war.'

And a divisional level capability (whether nationally led or as a contribution to a multinational force) is fundamental. Indeed, going back to command, the additional demands of hybrid conflict means the division is the lowest level of command which can cope effectively with the complexity of conducting integrated planning for both major combat operations and stabilization operations simultaneously. If a brigade is to be committed to battle properly, it will depend on the support and planning muscle provided by a divisional headquarters to tee up the necessary assets, both military and non-military, in order to allow the brigade commander to concentrate on winning the tactical battle, and the same principle applies between the corps and divisional level.

On top of this, future conflict will continue to demand the techniques required for major combat operations. While hybrid warfare may not take a traditional, easily recognisable form, it may still require the preparation, assembly,

movement and employment of significant ground manoeuvre forces – supported by air and maritime power – in a manner we no longer typically consider, let alone practise regularly.

There are other enduring requirements and capabilities. While society may change, the human dimension remains the same and we need tough, well trained, highly motivated soldiers prepared to close with, and defeat or destroy, the enemy. Our traditional combined arms skills at battlegroup, brigade and divisional level and much of the equipment procured against a Cold War imperative such as tanks, armoured infantry fighting vehicles and self propelled artillery, remain fundamental to our efforts because of their capability for firepower and protected mobility – as we have seen in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

But hybrid conflict and the imperative for precision require more than this and we have learned and come to take for granted new capabilities. Indeed tactical commanders from brigade commander down to company level are now routinely integrating assets hitherto held at the strategic level in their tactical battles. This is the new combined arms cyber warfare and includes national strategic intelligence assets, air, aviation, Special Forces, ISTAR and EW to achieve the sort of precision find, track, strike, exploit sequence that is increasingly our modus operandi.

So the complexity of hybrid conflict will continue to demand more of our people, both civil and military, for the realities we face are contradictory narratives, blurred end states, uncertainty and lack of clarity. This means we must equip our commanders intellectually and conceptually for operations in the complex kaleidoscope of hybrid conflict they will face.

As fighters they must be just as capable of synchronising traditional combined arms capabilities at divisional, brigade and battlegroup level and applying force with a precision previously the preserve of Special Forces. In addition, they need to be capable of orchestrating capabilities hitherto held at the strategic/theatre level, what I call the new combined arms warfare, now routinely done by battlegroups and brigades in a way in which very recently would not have been done below division or possibly corps level.

Furthermore, on this battleground for the minds of the people, they must also be able to interact with the indigenous population and understand local dynamics and culture in a manner unseen since colonial days, achieved then with men and women who spent their lives among the people and societies amongst whom they operated. Our commanders must be trained to navigate through chaos and have the agility to operate alongside civilian agencies of

all types, coalition partners and a host nation with sovereign authority, all of whom will be running different agendas. Our ethos must be to expect chaos and be unfazed by it.

To conclude, success in battle has always gone to the commander who can best adapt to the circumstances and fog of war; is quickest to out-think his enemy; capable of the inspirational leadership which the demands of war require if men are to overcome their natural fears and who can best manage scarce assets when 'even the simplest things are very difficult.'

The conduct of operations today and in the future requires no less. What has changed is that generalship now requires more than the ability to command purely military capabilities in a straightforward military context. Success in war, today and in the future, depends on the achievement of unity of purpose and effort with other non-military players in the theatre of conflict, for there can be no purely military solutions. Hybrid conflict needs hybrid solutions.

Command and campaign design must be adapted if the challenge of achieving truly integrated planning and execution with other government departments, NGOs and IOs is to be achieved. Joint and multinational operations underpinned by trust, training and appropriate doctrine are axiomatic. So command of joint operations, now and in the future, will depend as much on the more traditional attributes of generalship, as on an understanding of, and a willingness to build partnerships and work alongside the critical non-military actors on the stage.

Nevertheless, when it comes to fighting, as it surely will, only through 'thought practising the stroke' as T. E. Lawrence put it, through training in those techniques which will certainly be required in the science of war and educating for the inevitable uncertainty demanded by the art of war, will Lawrence's 'irrational tenth, the test of generals' flash across the pool, as Lawrence described: 'like a kingfisher'. War may be too important to be left to generals, but only with the right generalship can wars be won.