

**COUNCIL OF MILITARY EDUCATION COMMITTEES
OF UNITED KINGDOM UNIVERSITIES**



THE CONUNDRUM OF LEADERSHIP

LEADERSHIP IN GOVERNMENT, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND SOCIETY

By Lord Owen

COMEC OCCASIONAL PAPER. No 2.

© Lord Owen, 2013.

No part of this publication, except for short extracts, may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form without the prior permission of Lord Owen.

c/o Secretary COMEC, 22, The Ridgeway, Putnoe, Bedford, MK41 8ET

Design and Layout by Kim Martin

Printed by Letterworks, Reading

Previous Papers

Occasional Paper No 1: University Service Units. What are they really for?

By Dr Patrick Mileham, 2012.

Online

These Papers can be viewed online at:

<http://www.comec.org.uk/publications/occasional>

**COUNCIL OF MILITARY EDUCATION COMMITTEES
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM**

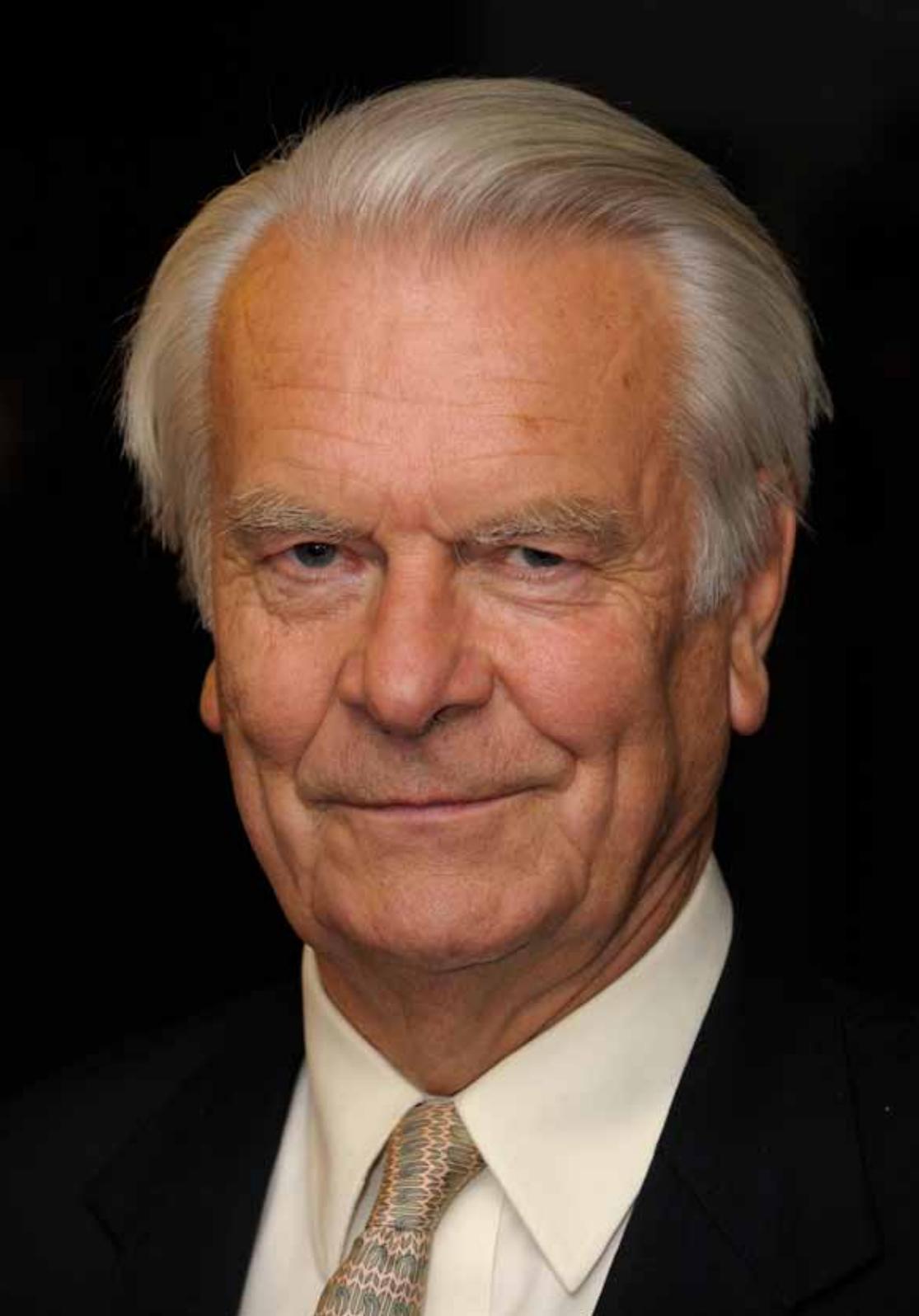


THE CONUNDRUM OF LEADERSHIP

LEADERSHIP IN GOVERNMENT, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND SOCIETY

By Lord Owen

COMEC OCCASIONAL PAPER. No 2.



The Author

David Owen studied medicine at Cambridge and St Thomas's Hospital, London, joined the Labour Party and was elected MP for Plymouth Sutton in 1966. From 1968 to 1970, he served as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Navy in Harold Wilson's first government and became shadow Junior Defence minister. After the 1974 general election he became Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health, before being promoted to Minister of State for Health in July 1974. In September 1976, Owen was appointed Minister of State at the Foreign Office and five months later, then aged thirty eight was appointed Foreign Secretary. Owen was identified with the Anglo-American plan for then-Rhodesia, which formed the basis for the eventual Lancaster House Agreement.

In 1981 with three others he set up the Social Democratic Party, the majority of whose members later merged with the Liberals to form the Liberal Democrat Party. Owen remained SDP leader until 1990. He did not contest the 1992 Election and was elevated to the House of Lords becoming a cross-bench peer. In that year Lord Owen was appointed EU co-chairman of the International Conference for the Former Yugoslavia (ICFY), along with Cyrus Vance, the former U.S. Secretary of State, as the UN co-chairman. The Vance-Owen Peace Plan of January 1993, tried to ensure that ethnic partition did not take place in the Balkans.

Lord Owen has continued to speak on matters of international affairs including on nuclear proliferation and constrained intervention. He was Chancellor of the University of Liverpool from 1996-2009, and has written a number of books, including *The Politics of Defence* (1972), *Human Rights* (1978), *Balkan Odyssey* (1995), *In Sickness and in Power: Illness in Heads of Government during the last 100 years* (2008), *The Hubris Syndrome; Bush, Blair and the Intoxication of Power* (2007/12), *Nuclear Papers* (2009), *Europe Restructured* (2012) and (ed.) *Bosnia-Herzegovina: The Vance Owen Peace Plan* (2013).



**FOREWORD BY
PROFESSOR DICK CLEMENTS MBE PhD CEng
CHAIRMAN COMEC**

I am pleased to introduce and commend this, the second in the COMEC Occasional Papers series. This paper was presented by Lord Owen as the first keynote address at the COMEC Defence Conference “Future Leadership Challenges” on Thursday 6 September 2013. Lord Owen’s paper, drawing on his wide experience of government, international affairs and interventions by supra-national bodies and multi-national alliances, set the tone for a day of stimulating papers and intense discussion and debate on the topic. Participants agreed that the conference overall was an outstanding success. This paper was a key contribution and COMEC is grateful to Lord Owen for permission to publish it as a COMEC Occasional Paper.

Dick Clements
→

THE CONUNDRUM OF LEADERSHIP

LEADERSHIP IN GOVERNMENT, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND SOCIETY

The ancient Greeks' worries about a leader developing the contempt that often accompanied hubris was reflected in their concerns about what we would call the military class and what they called a 'guardian' class. As Plato put it in *Republic* they are 'noble dogs' but men who have to combine being "gentle to their own, to their fellow citizens, and cruel to their enemies.

Of all the different groupings, the military, after politicians and business leaders, must be the most prone to what I have called acquired Hubris Syndrome. But this element of being gentle to their own men is a factor that may work against the development of hubris in the military. Not many of the really great military commanders have risen high without a reputation for worrying about the lives and the conditions of the men that they lead, but some have.

We demand of our military the capacity to develop a very broad mindset, what the historian, Samuel P Huntington, describes as "pessimistic, collectivist, historically inclined, power-orientated, nationalistic, militaristic, pacifist and instrumentalist in its view of the military profession. It is, in brief, realistic and conservative". That is a very tall order and I would add after "power-orientated" not hubristic. I grow increasingly of the view that the military man in recent history who managed to combine more of that mindset than any other were Generals Eisenhower in the US and Slim in the UK.

The military mind, which is trained to respond instantly to higher commands, is prone to model itself on great military figures from the past for whom there is considerable tolerance of vanity, arrogance, pride and egotism. There is also feeling of a covenant between leaders and their subordinates reflected in care about their wellbeing and in trying to protect their lives and limbs. The necessary courage, risk-taking and resourcefulness of a military leader may stem from a hubristic temperament but that is not the same as acquiring Hubris Syndrome. We need to write and to talk more about this syndrome and recognize its signs and symptoms early enough to either moderate its development through mentoring or ensure that the person never reaches the top echelons of military command.

The conundrum of military leadership lies in an understanding of the mindset re-

quired in our military leaders and how they work with politicians. I have chosen four areas for comment in that regard.

First, Kosovo carries still the mistaken mindset held by many opinion formers to this day that bombing alone brought an end to NATO's humanitarian intervention. Also General Michael Jackson's successful appeal against an unwise order from SACEUR stemmed from an "historically inclined" mindset.

A direct NATO Russian clash came in the former Yugoslavia over Kosovo in March 1999 when President Yeltsin made it clear he would have no alternative but to veto any military action proposed in the Security Council against President Milošević's paramilitaries and military forces suppressing the Kosovar Albanians. As a consequence, not wanting to make life anymore difficult than it already was for Yeltsin in his relations with the Duma, NATO bypassed the Security Council and stretched the elastic in the wording of the UN Charter to near breaking point by adopting a humanitarian intervention of the type pioneered by the US, UK and France to protect the Kurds in Iraq in 1991. The Supreme Allied Commander in Europe was in charge of the operation in Kosovo and American armed forces made by far the largest contribution flying some 62% of the total sorties over the 78-day air campaign compared to the UK's 10 per cent.

From the start the US and the UK very unwisely made clear publicly that there would be no deployment of troops on the ground in Kosovo. A view supported by the then CDS, General Sir Charles Guthrie, writing in the *Sunday Times* criticising Henry Kissinger and myself for advocating the use of ground troops. Cruise missiles were used very effectively outside Kosovo in the rest of Serbia with great accuracy and took out pin-point military and political targets in and around Belgrade raising issues about regime change within a humanitarian mission that returned over Libya and are present today over Syria. Two Ministries in the main street of Belgrade were destroyed while neighbouring buildings, apart from glass, remained unaffected. Bridges over the Danube were destroyed affecting navigation. The house in which Milošević was believed to be living was destroyed and the Chinese Embassy, falsely claimed by a NATO spokesman to have been the result of a mistaken identification, was deliberately targeted. To many people's surprise, the Serb forces in Kosovo withstood the bombardment with surprisingly few casualties or loss of tanks, vehicles or artillery, most of which they hid or put in bunkers. As the weeks went by, first Prime Minister Blair and then President Clinton spoke of sending in

ground forces and it is now claimed this was the decisive factor. The negotiating process was, however, by then well underway.

Yet it was when President Yeltsin stepped in to repay Clinton for his patient understanding over the earlier years, and used Russian diplomacy to help broker a settlement, that the withdrawal of Serb troops came about. On 14 April Yeltsin appointed his former Prime Minister, Victor Chernomyrdin (and importantly the former head of Gazprom, since Serbia was hugely dependent on Russian gas), to be his special envoy for dealing with Kosovo. The subsequent turbulent diplomacy, over some weeks, is engagingly described by Strobe Talbott in a chapter called "The Hammer and the Anvil" where Chernomyrdin was the hammer and Ahtisaari, the Finnish President, the anvil. Talbott, Russian speaking and a close friend of Clinton since student days, proved to be the modest but irreplaceable facilitator. The Germans also helped. The Russians have never revealed their negotiating hand but it is highly probable that Milosevic only ordered his senior military officers in the meeting on 3 June to withdraw from Kosovo because of an earlier visit to Belgrade by Chernomyrdin when he was told the Russian position and I believe quite specifically that there would be no more Russian gas if he did not do so. The Serbian Generals who believed they were winning the confrontation on the ground in Kosovo, never forgave Milosevic for buckling. In past Serbian elections Kosovo had brought Milosevic to power but the withdrawal broke his hold on power in the elections that followed.

Dangerous consequences have followed for decision making on Afghanistan and Iraq because of this widespread belief that NATO won in Kosovo through air power alone. Some military leaders and many political leaders are still unaware of how little impact NATO action had on Serb forces on the ground in Kosovo. Even the eventual threat of using ground forces had little effect on them for they knew attacking from the south through Macedonia was fraught with difficulty for NATO. Those lessons were still not fully learnt when it came to deal with Libya in 2011 and now in Syria.

The other potential flashpoint that developed in the immediate aftermath of the Kosovo ceasefire was when Russian military commanders decided to move their troops in Bosnia into Serbia with a view to occupying the important air base in Kosovo as Serb forces withdrew and before NATO forces were due under the detailed ceasefire arrangements to take the Serb forces place. General Wesley Clarke,

at the time SACEUR, ordered the British NATO Commander in Kosovo, General Sir Michael Jackson, to unilaterally change the agreed ceasefire arrangements and deploy immediately NATO forces to the airfield and to get there by helicopter before the Russians. General Jackson, fortunately a Russian speaker, understood the grave dangers of tearing up the agreement which he had painfully negotiated with the Serb generals who had never wanted the ceasefire in the first place. Jackson used his right as a subordinate NATO commander to appeal the order to his own Chief of Defence Staff. London and Washington upheld Jackson's judgement and NATO forces were not sent in advance to the airfield.

A few Russians did arrive ahead of NATO forces at the air base but after a minor stand off the issues were resolved. It was helped by the refusal of countries like Bulgaria and Romania, after urgent US representations, to accept Russian military aircraft overflying their airspace to reinforce a Russian presence in the Kosovo air base which brought home to Moscow how isolated their position had become. Whether this was private enterprise on behalf of the Russian military, without the endorsement of President Yeltsin, is still not known for sure, but if so it was one more sign of growing tensions between the military and the politicians. Under President Putin, the military are stronger and more at ease but they still have strong resentments about their loss of status in Russian society, a demoralisation that started during their ill-fated invasion and later withdrawal from Afghanistan. The military have no longer got the capacity and power they once had in the old Soviet Union.

Kosovo demonstrated that (1) NATO over the years has developed flexible and realistic command and control procedures. (2) The danger of a Presidential political appointment to SACEUR, as was Clarke's, is that they can lack the confidence of the Joint Chiefs in Washington. (3) The advantage of a military commander being "historically inclined" and able to understand their potential adversaries is underlined by Kosovo. That Kosovo ed Blair's hubris which then became full blown Hubris Syndrome following 9/11 along with George W. Bush.

Second, the mindset of Admiral Sir Michael Boyce. The UK Chief of Defence Staff's decision on Iraq was "instrumentalist" towards the military and he unequivocally warned Blair over insufficient aftermath planning and troop numbers. He emphasised the importance of legality for the armed services.

A Secret and Strictly Personal 'UK eyes only' memorandum dated 23 July 2002 described a meeting attended by three Cabinet ministers – the Prime Minister, Tony

Blair, the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, and the Defence Secretary – as well as the Attorney General. Neither Blair’s deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, nor the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, attended. John Scarlett, the head of the JIC, was present, as was the head of MI6, Sir Richard Dearlove.

Dearlove reported after Washington: ‘Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But *the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy . . . There was little discussion in Washington of the aftermath after military action* [emphasis added].’

Later Dearlove told George Tenet he had objected to the word ‘fixed’ in the record of the meeting and had it corrected to reflect his view ‘about the undisciplined manner in which the intelligence was being used’. The Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, said the military ‘were continuing to ask lots of questions. For instance, what were the consequences if Saddam used WMD on day one or if Baghdad did not collapse and urban war fighting began?’ Three of Blair’s political appointees were also present, Jonathan Powell, Alastair Campbell and Sally Morgan. Thereafter politics, not military strategy, dominated as they started to prepare public opinion by pushing WMD to the forefront.

In evidence to the Iraq Inquiry Admiral Boyce was reminded about the Ministry of Defence briefing of the Prime Minister on 15 January 2003 where the record of the meeting has the Prime Minister being told:

“Aftermath planning was still quite immature and any rapid regime collapse followed by a power vacuum could result in internecine fighting between the Shia and Sunni populations, particularly in Baghdad, and adventuring by adjacent countries and ethnic groups that irretrievably fractured the country.”

One of the Committee, Sir Roderic Lyne, actually said to Boyce, “So you had got it pretty well right?”

In another exchange Boyce clearly revealed the fundamental divide in the American military:

Sir John Chilcot: I suppose what I am asking is you would have been aware of the fact that there were divided opinions even within the American military at senior level?

Admiral The Lord Boyce: Yes, I was aware of it and there were I guess two reasons why there were division of ideas. There was the one bunch of people probably, certainly, led by Rumsfeld who definitely had a view that we do war fighting, we don't do peacekeeping or nation building. That was not just an idle mantra. That was passionately, passionately believed, and combined with the new idea about warfare, where everything could be done electronically or by high tech and therefore didn't require boots on the ground, it meant you went in with lots and lots of high tech with as few people as possible, did what you needed to do and got out fast. So that sort of attitude of mind "We do war fighting and furthermore we do it at this very high tech level", meant you were going to have a very anorexic force level in terms of number of bodies, of soldiers. That was one view that was certainly held by Rumsfeld."

"Then you have the other side, like the Chief of the Army, Shinseki, who believed that that was not a very sensible course of action, because he could see (a) the high tech didn't necessarily give you what you wanted, and also the need for having the troops on the ground when you got down to providing advice and security and a stabilization force until you got your new structures in place. I think more people sided with him than they did with Rumsfeld frankly but that's my personal feeling rather than – I can't give you any factual evidence on that."

On 7 March 2003 Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney General and constitutionally the government's independent legal adviser, sent Tony Blair a memo titled 'Advice on the Legality of Military Action against Iraq without a Further Security Council Resolution'. It was a long, balanced judgment but in places it was clearly equivocal. It said that a 'reasonable case' could be made that Resolution 1441 could 'in principle' revive the authorisation to attack Iraq but admitted that such a case would be challengeable in court. As usual, this advice was not made public but unusually it was not shown to the Cabinet.

It must not be forgotten that on 24 September 1991 UN inspectors in Baghdad found a large number of documents detailing Iraq's nuclear weapons programme in a building opposite a major hotel used by foreign journalists. Following the withdrawal of UN inspectors from Iraq in 1998 and in response to Saddam's non-cooperation and the ground to air missiles attacks on US and UK planes enforcing the protection of the Kurdish area in the North, the USA and Britain launched a four-day bombing campaign against Iraqi targets. The US and UK in December 1998

had dropped more than 600 bombs and launched 415 cruise missiles against Iraqi targets during four days, killing an estimated 1,400 members of Iraq's Republican Guard. The action, which had been targeted on some nuclear facilities, was later assessed as having set back Saddam's nuclear weapons programme by two years. This military operation was undertaken, as in 1993 and 1996, and again in 2002 and 2003, with the USA and the UK claiming the authority of the UN resolutions passed in 1990 and 1991 and in addition UNSCR 1205, passed in 1998. No country on the Security Council formally challenged the authority of the US and UK action by putting the matter to the vote, which they could have done. France and Russia could have challenged these actions on legal grounds in the Security Council then as they did later in 2002-3.

The Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, who all along was clearly concerned about the legal position began to demand a legal opinion from the Prime Minister in January 2003 and on a number of occasions thereafter. He wanted an unequivocal reassurance from the Attorney General about the legality of the action to which he was about to commit troops. This was against a growing background of disquiet in the military. To some extent this was provoked by the creation of the new International Criminal Court (ICC), and the alleged risk that that UK service personnel might be indicted by that Court for their conduct during the anticipated war. In fact, the ICC cannot prosecute an illegal war, known as a crime of aggression, for its 'jurisdiction is limited to the conduct of war, not the decision to go to war'. The subsequent occupation and reconstruction in Iraq were later authorised by the Security Council, though on the basis that this authority did not extend to the original military intervention whose legal justification has remained highly contentious.

On 17 March Goldsmith produced a very much shorter and unequivocal statement which said that 'a material breach of Resolution 678 *revived* (emphasis added) the authority to use force under Resolution 678'. The judgement of the Iraq Inquiry on the aspect of "renewal" of UN resolutions will be very important for future conflicts. Boyce was informed the impending war was legal. This statement by the Attorney was given orally to the Cabinet and reiterated in Parliament. Boyce had gone as far as he constitutionally could in protecting the personnel under his command and he emerged well in my view out of the war and makes me wonder why he was replaced as CDS in the early weeks of the war.

Third, the military and political handling of Ambassador Sawers memo of 11 May 2003. This was, I believe, the single most important occasion when the UK could have dramatically changed US policy on the conduct of the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq. The, by then, Chief of Defence Staff, General Walker, showed a mindset that was not “power orientated” failing to understand the importance of changing minds in Washington to increase troop levels.

On 1 May 2003 George W. Bush claimed ‘Mission Accomplished’ on board the aircraft carrier, *USS Abraham Lincoln*, steaming off the coast of California. On 11 May John Sawers, the British ambassador to Egypt, who had previously worked for Blair in No. 10 and who had been specially sent into Iraq by Blair to find out what was happening, sent the Prime Minister a memo entitled ‘Iraq: What’s Going Wrong’. His summary of the Americans’ aftermath team under retired US General Jay Garner was succinct: ‘No leadership, no strategy, no coordination, no structure and inaccessible to ordinary Iraqis.’

Sawers’ clear view was that more troops were needed and he suggested that ‘an operational UK presence in Baghdad is worth considering, despite the obvious political problem . . . one battalion with a mandate to deploy into the streets could still make an impact.’ Sawers’ view about the need for more troops was backed up by Major General Albert Whitley, the most senior British officer with the US land forces, serving in the US headquarters of Lieutenant General David McKiernan. The issue was whether to bring the British 16 Air Assault Brigade, in Iraq but due to return home, to Baghdad. The Sawers memo could hardly have been a more serious communication to a Prime Minister with thousands of troops at risk in Basra, for what affected Baghdad was soon bound to affect them in Basra too.

What then happened in Downing Street to the Sawers memo? I hope the Iraq Inquiry will reveal who saw it. Whether any Cabinet members met with the military to consider deploying more troops? What was the advice from the Secretary of State for Defence and the Foreign Secretary to the Prime Minister and dwell on its importance, but I am not sure they will. The length of time this Inquiry has taken is a disgrace and we are suffering over Syria from the absence of lessons.

On 10 December 2009 Sawers, now Sir John, and head of MI6, gave evidence to the Iraq Inquiry about his memo written to arrive on desks in London on 11 May 2003. He describes it as “my first significant report back to London, which I sent on the Sunday night, the day before Bremer arrived, [12 May] [stressing] that there were a

number of big issues that needed to be addressed. I listed five.” One issue he listed was that “the Iraqi army had disbanded itself, that the many conscripts had gone back home and the units had all dispersed. So the Iraqi army didn’t exist, in many ways, except on paper when I arrived in early May.” This evidence was very different from that given to the Inquiry by the British Defence Secretary, Geoff Hoon, who believed the Iraq army had been disbanded by a US order and claimed he had argued with Rumsfeld “against the summary dismissal”.

Sawers crucially then went on:

“General Mike Jackson, who was then the newly appointed Chief of General Staff visited Baghdad in my first few days there” ...”in discussion it became clear that part of the problem was the posture of the US army. They were in their tanks in their Darth Vader kit, with wrap-around sunglasses and helmets and flak jackets and everything else, and there was no real rapport between the US army and the ordinary citizens of the capital. Mike Jackson, and I have to say I have some sympathy with this, thought there was a case of bringing a larger contingent of ‘Paras’ not just the 20 or so in the platoon, but a battalion of ‘Paras’ up to work with the Americans to demonstrate a different way of deploying in urban areas, and this was all part of what we had learnt in other places, in Northern Ireland and so on.”

“ I reported this as one option back to London, after I discussed it with Mike, *but it was clearly a military matter* (emphasis added). There were differences of view between the Chiefs of Staff on this. I think the officials in No 10 were quite attracted by the idea but in the end the military advice that came to the Prime Minister was against doing this.”

“Unfortunately, in some ways the idea had gained some traction with the Americans, both in Washington and in Baghdad, who were quite attracted to the idea as well. So in a sense we marched them up to the top of a hill and then we marched them back down by raising the idea and then turning it down, and when the Prime Minister visited Basra towards the end of May, at the end of this little saga, Bremer said to him how sorry he was that Britain had decided against making available a battalion of ‘Paras’ to go to Baghdad.”

Blair’s memoirs, amazingly, given the crucial importance of Sawers’ recommendations sent to him on 11 May, gives no explanation why he did not deploy troops up

to Baghdad. He writes only about how on his return after his visit to Basra *at the end of May* (my underlining), "I called the key Ministers together and gave a series of instructions to get our help to the US on a better footing. We had thought they would handle the centre of the country and we the south. I realized after that visit that unless they succeeded, we would fail. I had sent John Sawers, my former key foreign policy adviser, to Baghdad. He came to the same conclusion: the American operation needed a drastic boost. I also sent a strong note to George and we then spoke by phone."

Sawers, under oral questioning, to the Iraq Inquiry, went into more detail about his attitude as to why the British should move troops into Baghdad and what was the problem with the American forces posture:

"they had not been able to transition from war fighting to peacekeeping, they had a heavy armoured division in place, whereas the much lighter (US) 101 Airborne Division up in Mosul were much lighter on their feet, much more engaged with the local population. The then unknown Major General David Petraeus was in charge and he showed what could be done in a city like Mosul, which was as divided and difficult to manage as Baghdad, but the 3 Infantry Division was not doing the task in what I thought was the best way. So it was partly style and that was my main concern."

"Bremer saw this as a serious problem as well, which was why he welcomed the idea of a parachute battalion from the UK coming up to the capital. He was also concerned about overall troop numbers and he raised this with President Bush on a number of occasions because the US plan was for a rapid drawdown of forces. Indeed the British plan was also for a rapid drawdown of forces. I do not have the exact numbers but I think the Americans were aiming by the summer to be down to 60 per cent of their force levels at the height of the conflict and the British forces were planning to be down to 40 per cent of their maximum forces. So both Washington and London were planning for very far-reaching reductions in force levels."

"It seemed to me, partly because the Iraqi regime had never been properly defeated and that the insurgency was growing, that the *après guerre*, the period after the war, was going to be more demanding than the war itself and that this needed to be taken fully into account. Bremer was very much of that mind and he raised it a number of times with Secretary Rumsfeld and,

I believe, with President Bush and achieved a slowing down of the US force levels.”

We know that Sawers returned to London a week after he had met Bremer and attended a regular weekly meeting of the Chiefs of Staff where “the main issue on the Chiefs of Staffs’ mind was whether we should send a battalion of the Parachute Regiment up to Baghdad to support the US efforts to maintain control of the capital.” At this moment Blair, in my view, should have intervened. The Chiefs could and should have been left under no illusion that the Prime Minister believed this was a decision with a huge political content. He should not have left the issue for Sawers to discuss. He, as a diplomat, had with both clarity and foresight made a farsighted recommendation. General Jackson, recently beaten by General Walker for the position of Chief of Staff, felt inhibited. At this point a Prime Ministerial intervention with the CDS was a *DUTY*. The Chiefs were entitled to know his view. It is not correct for Sawers to say deployment was a “military matter” alone; it had huge strategic implications. No Inquiry worthy of respect can avoid taking a view on this possible deployment.

On 1 February 2010, in evidence to the Inquiry, Lord Walker of Aldringham, who had become the Chief of Defence Staff on 1 May 2003 following on from Admiral Boyce, admitted that he was aware of Shinseki’s concerns and Rumsfeld’s wish to take Iraq with quite a small force and that this would leave a gap and that not enough troops had been sent to Iraq. He also mentioned that he would have preferred the British to be in the northern part of Iraq had it been possible to come in from Turkey. He had himself visited Baghdad very early in May 2003 before the situation had deteriorated. The following exchange then took place in the Inquiry.

Sir Lawrence Freedman: There were approaches made by the United States to send 16 Air Assault to Baghdad and I think you had opposed that. Is that correct?

General Lord Walker: Yes

Sir Lawrence Freedman: Why was that?

General Lord Walker: You say I opposed it. We, the Chiefs, collectively, opposed it. Well, I say “collectively”, we didn’t all agree about it, but it seemed to me that this was in the early days and I think it must have been shortly after

John Sawers' arrival, which would have been mid-2003. We had enough of a problem keeping our logistic supplies and the expertise needed down in the south. I also came to the conclusion, having seen Baghdad, this vast, sprawling city in which there weren't enough troops really to control it in the true sense of the word – I think the Americans must have had about 130,000 at one stage, of which about 80 [presumably meaning 80,000] were in Baghdad and we were offering to send up to 3,000 or 3,500. I did not think they were going to alter the price of fish, to be honest."

..."But at that time we thought we were quite good and I think there was a view that, if we could get some nice smiling 'Paras' on the streets of Sadr City, this would transform Baghdad overnight, and I am afraid I didn't subscribe to that."

Altering the "price of fish", Walker did not seem to understand, was about changing attitudes in Washington. In this particular case the UK could act on its own and the US would be bound to follow. The CDS should have understood this even if his Prime Minister appeared not to.

I have quoted extensively from this part of a mass of evidence taken during the Iraq Inquiry because I believe it reveals the nub of why the handling of the aftermath in Iraq was such a disaster. Both President Bush and Prime Minister Blair, despite being given clear military advice stuck hubristically to the view that they could get away with so few troops on the ground. That number proved totally insufficient to control the urban areas. The evidence to the Inquiry from Admiral Boyce, which I have already quoted, makes it very clear that Blair had been warned about this danger. There is no acknowledgement of this in Blair's memoirs. He summarises the position of what went wrong without any admission that he had been warned on 15 January about "internecine fighting between the Shia and Sunni populations" particularly in Baghdad or any recognition that he had not acted over that warning. Bush, in his memoirs, was more contrite and open about the insufficient number of troops.

Blair writes:

"What happened in Iraq after May 2003 was, at first, relatively benign. There was looting and some violence; some attacks on coalition forces, but they were containable....What happened was that the security situation deteriorated. It did

so in part as a result of Iraqi elements acting of their own accord, of tribal, religious and criminal groups deciding to abort the nascent democracy and to try to seize power. But the critical, extra dimension, the one which translated a difficult situation into near chaos, was the linking up of these internal dissident factions with al-Qaeda on the one hand and Iran on the other.”

It is hard to believe that Sawers’ suggestion to send British troops into Baghdad was in effect ignored by Blair and that he did not discuss the issue with the CDS or senior Ministers. He knew from the memo that Jackson had been in Baghdad and supported Sawers. We now know that there was a difference of opinion in the Chiefs of Staff between Jackson and Walker, and that the other two Chiefs from the Air Force and the Navy presumably sided with the CDS. But it is in exactly this sort of situation – political as well as military - that a Prime Minister is fully entitled and indeed ought to intervene with his own judgement. Looking back over the history of Lloyd George, Churchill, Thatcher and John Major’s involvement in the conduct of war, their engagement and attention to detail was sadly lacking in the case of Blair.

Fourth, Afghanistan from 2001 to the present day presents a compelling case to establish an Inquiry in the hope that its conclusions may change the mindset of the military by the second quarter of the 21st Century. In short, to become less hubristic, more “realistic and conservative” as well as “pacifist” in the sense of being ready to seize opportunities for a negotiated solution. Such a mindset was present in Inge, the then CDS and Generals Rose and Smith in the civil war in Bosnia.

The US handling of Afghanistan was initially very successful in the way in which the CIA with suitcases of money and the US air controllers on the ground tilted the balance of the fighting between the Mujahedin and the Taliban. The mistakes, as with Iraq, came in the aftermath, arguably in Afghanistan more from the military than the politicians, in contrast to Iraq where the biggest errors came from the politicians.

By the time Al-Qaeda were on the run and had begun to move to the border and then across the border into Pakistan it was a great mistake not to shift military attention to winning the support of the Taleban instead of making them the enemy. It was also vital to achieve a better balance between the different Mujahedin and the Taleban and not concentrate so much power in Tajik hands.

It was understandable that America, after being attacked on 11 September 2001 in New York and Washington, would want to deal with Afghanistan on their own. But the manner in which the US Secretary of Defense, Rumsfeld, distanced the US from the offer of the European NATO members to invoke Article V in solidarity with the US, was very foolish. Article V tells the Member States, “that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America should be considered as an attack against them all.” This US rejection still rankles with some in Europe. Bush’s rejection of Putin’s olive branch and solidarity was foolish. More importantly was the failure to build on the Bonn Conference in December 2001 and the very evident readiness there of both Iran and Russia to help. Instead President Bush snubbed Iran and patronised Russia and the UK appears to have done little to challenge US attitudes and approach, but rather at a military level in those early years reinforced them. This may be too harsh, but only an Inquiry can establish the truth.

By April 2003 in Afghanistan NATO was, for the first time in its history, in charge of a mission outside the North Atlantic area. This involvement may in the next few years define the evolution of a very different NATO. Long since gone are the 1970-80 debates about whether NATO should or should not operate out of area. NATO has shown it can operate with little controversy outside the European theatre. The controversy is over what NATO forces are actually doing in operational terms in Afghanistan.

The quotation at the start of my lecture about the mindset of the military contains the words “realistic and conservative” also “pacifist” and they are particularly apt in the case of Afghanistan.

The 2011 Report of the Century Foundation “Afghanistan: Negotiating Peace” has words which the military should have understood and thought hard about from the start:

“The Hadith records a relevant instruction of the Prophet Muhammad: “Shall I inform you of something more excellent than, fasting, prayer, and charity? It is putting things right between people, making peace between people and restoring good relations between people.” Or as was more epigrammatically proclaimed six centuries before, “Blessed are the peacemakers” for making peace, perhaps as much as fighting war requires courage.”

Too few military leaders seemed to have drawn the correct lessons from the mili-

tary lessons from the experience of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan following their invasion in December 1979, under Brezhnev and Gromyko. Initially, like the US and the UK over 30 years later, the Russians were reasonably successful. Yet by 1989 they faced the necessity of humiliatingly withdrawing their forces who had been unable to overcome the Afghan Mujahedin. The Russian defeat in Afghanistan was as ignominious as that sustained by the British Empire at the height of its power on the Indian sub continent. The Russians had for their part been defeated in Afghanistan by the British 80 years before, as part of the 'Great Game'. The Americans and the British in the 1980s, with the support of Saudi Arabia and the military in Pakistan, had armed the forces of the Mujahedin to attack the Soviet forces. After the Soviet withdrawal, Mujahedin divisions, both personal and religious, led to a record of great brutality and chaotic government. Most Afghans thereafter, for a time at least, welcomed the forces of Islamic fundamentalism and the Taleban winning control of Kabul and then Afghanistan. Their abysmal record, however, soon led to disillusionment. These historic facts are often forgotten but they are a reason why many Afghans do not see the Taleban as the enemy in the way NATO too frequently does. Al-Qaeda, by contrast, did understand the complex power structures in the country and arranged for the assassination of the relatively popular Mujahedin leader, Massoud, two days before their 9/11 attack. I had previously met Massoud years before and he had clearly the potential to bind Afghanistan together. The dangers of the Taleban's readiness to provide Bin Laden with a base to build up Al-Qaeda was exposed for all the world to see in New York.

Afghanistan has moved from being a country in 1979 which few took any notice of, to a country which defeated the Soviet Union and which the US felt they had to invade in 2001 in order to topple the Taleban from power; to a country which NATO is now leaving and where the Taleban is poised to return to power in areas like Helmand. Why were the UK military so optimistic and gung-ho to fight in Helmand in 2006? How could the then Secretary of State for Defence, John Reid, have been so unrealistic about casualties saying "We would be perfectly happy to leave in three years time without firing one shot". There was certainly no mindset of "pessimism" on display, let alone a mindset that was "historically inclined". A fundamental question that needs examination in a public Inquiry is what that mindset was? No amount of blaming of the politicians for the paucity of Army equipment and lack of helicopters will suffice. The higher command in the UK over Afghanistan made many mistakes.

Good books have been written on Afghanistan but they only touch on the decision making between field commanders and successive CDSs and the scathing criticism by the senior diplomat, Sherard Cowper-Coles, in his recent book *Cables from Kabul* of the dysfunctional relationship between the politicians and the military cannot be just left on the table. As he said he never quite understood why Britain took upon itself to act as principal cheerleader for the American-led effort at a military colonialism in Afghanistan. He writes about how the government was “subject to continual pressure from the British military” to provide more troops and more resources. Also how the MOD “fell short of the standards for clear and objective advice”. While UK troops are still fighting this is neither the time nor the place to expose the many private criticisms of junior commanders. The time for an Inquiry is after the 2015 General Election. Whether it happens will probably depend in large part on whether the Iraq Inquiry is judged to have done its job when it eventually reports in 2014. It needs to take a cold hard look at military intervention and nation building. Draw lessons for the future, particularly the military/political interface.

Having travelled over the mountains of Afghanistan as a 21 year old medical student and watched the country very carefully ever since, I never believed that an invading force, whether Russia or the US, should impose a centralized state. Nor could they eradicate the drug culture or quickly change deep-seated traditions over women in some parts of the country. I have been pessimistic from the start and deliberately stood back from visiting the military in Afghanistan or criticizing the conduct of the war. But year by year and month by month my unease has grown.

All is not well in the UK military higher command particularly in the Army, as evidenced over the last twelve years in both Afghanistan and Iraq. It serves no purpose to deny that the outcomes in Basra and Helmand have not reflected well on the reputation of the British military. It can only be corrected with a greater examination of the facts and circumstances than has yet begun to be attempted. The core reason I believe is that the mindset of military commanders overall needs attention and that is why I have emphasised the essentials of such a mindset. Pessimistic, collectivist, historically inclined, power orientated, not hubristic, nationalistic, militaristic, pacifist and instrumentalist in its view of the military profession. It is, in brief, realistic and conservative.