

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



LEADERSHIP IN FUTURE FORCE 2020

By General Sir Richard Barrons

COMEC OCCASIONAL PAPER. No 3.

Series Editor

Dr Patrick Mileham

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The Author
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KCB CBE ADC Gen
Commander Joint Forces Command

General Sir Richard Barrons was commissioned into the Royal Regiment of Artillery in 1977, prior to reading for a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Queen's College, Oxford. He has completed a Masters in Defence Administration (1990), Army Staff College (1991) and the Higher Command and Staff Course (2003). He was appointed MBE in 1993, OBE in 1999, CBE in 2003, awarded QCVS in 2004 and 2006 and appointed as an Officer of the US Legion of Merit in 2009. He is an ADC to Her Majesty the Queen and was appointed KCB in 2013. He is the Colonel Commandant and President of the Honourable Artillery Company and is Honorary Colonel of 3rd Regiment Royal Horse Artillery.

He has completed a range of regimental duties in UK, Germany and worldwide on training. On operations he has served extensively in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan in UN, UK and NATO appointments. He has commanded units at Battery (B Battery, 1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery), Regiment (3rd Regiment Royal Horse Artillery, 1999, including Kosovo and Bosnia) and Brigade (39 Infantry Brigade in Northern Ireland). As Major General he was Deputy Commanding General of Multinational Corps Iraq (Baghdad, 2008) leading on operations with the Iraqi Armed Forces. He was appointed Chief of Staff of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps in April 2009 and, shortly afterwards, moved again to be Director Force Reintegration in HQ ISAF assisting the Afghan Government's efforts on Taliban reintegration and political reconciliation.

He was Assistant Chief of the General Staff (2010) covering the SDSR and Defence Reform exercises before being promoted to Lieutenant General (2011) and taking post as Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Military Strategy & Operations) - the director of operations for UK armed forces. He assumed command of Joint Forces Command on promotion to General, 19 April 2013.

General Barrons is married to Cherry. They have two children: Annabel (22) and Charlotte (20). General Barrons enjoys downhill skiing, cycling, military history, good films and peripatetic gardening.





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

I am delighted to be able to introduce COMEC Occasional Paper no. 3. The paper presented by General Sir Richard Barrons, Commander, Joint Forces Command at the conclusion of the COMEC Defence Conference “Future Leadership Challenges” on 6 September 2013 represents an important contribution to the identification and discussion of future challenges faced by UK Forces. General Barrons discusses the nature of future threats and the environment in which we will meet and counter them. He identifies some important developments in Command and Control, the role of the National Security Council, and relationships with NATO allies and the UN. The new importance of the Army Reserve and the threats of cyber warfare are noted. General Barrons concludes that the challenges of leadership are perhaps greater than ever, requiring well educated men and women of strong character and intellectual strength, flexible, decisive, professionally competent and resilient. As General Barrons concludes, “we need to redouble our commitment to being good at developing our leaders”.

Dick Clements
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‘LEADERSHIP IN FUTURE FORCE 2020’

**By General Sir Richard Barrons KCB CBE,
Commander Joint Force Command**

Thank you for the invitation to speak about Future Force in 2020 (FF2020). I shall start by setting out what I think we mean by the future.

To begin with, as the UK Armed Forces conclude their combat role in Afghanistan by the end of 2014 we will be bringing the curtain down on more than ten years of continuous campaigning in Iraq and Afghanistan. This marks the conclusion of a period where we have optimised the Armed Forces for enduring medium-scale engagements in very difficult counter insurgency operations. It marks a shift to a focus on the combination of first, more investment in forward engagement around the world in order to build the capacity of our friends to forestall the outbreak of conflict; and second, the creation of a modernised expeditionary force called the Joint Expeditionary Force, able to deter and fight with allies if it becomes necessary. Future Force 2020 is the capability - manpower, equipment, readiness - to do this.

A major imperative of this transition is the need to recognise how the character of conflict has changed while we have been busy in Iraq and South Asia. We are now again very clearly in the age where the proliferation of ballistic missiles capable of carrying a variety of warheads exists in the hands of many nations, with whom we are not necessarily on brilliant terms. This means today that forces which may be stationed in the Middle East are in range of these weapons and, in the medium term, so will be the United Kingdom.

We also live in a world where some nations elect to hold stocks of chemical and biological weapons; where integrated air defence systems are becoming more

common, more lethal and more difficult to counter; and where ships at sea can be vulnerable to land-based missiles at ranges up to 300 kilometres and beyond. We also have to take account of the reality that the cyber domain is now a routine part of the interaction between states and other actors. Cyber brings both tremendous vulnerabilities and tremendous opportunities.

If you bundle all these together it seems to me that leadership of the Armed Forces that we will need in this decade and the next, will require a great deal more than expertise in counter insurgency, stabilisation and counter-terrorism. As you well know, even that has been hard enough given the casualties which have accumulated from Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and small arms fire over the last ten years. In my view the sorts of conflict that could lie ahead appear to be much more potentially dangerous whether we take part in them or not.

So we should take as our starting-point for Future Force 2020 that we will need capable leaders at all levels, from the strategic to the tactical, who are mentally, physically and emotionally equipped to deal with the stresses of full-on warfare. They should still expect to step into operations, such as counter terrorism and peace support, but these categories of expertise cannot be regarded as sufficient. We must cover the full canvas again.

With that in mind, I thought I might turn first to the implications for this leadership at the strategic level, as we must recognise how civilian control of the military is now exercised, having changed during the course of this current government with the establishment of the National Security Council (NSC). Under the Prime Minister's leadership all arms of government have been formally brought together to deal with matters of national security, including military operations, at the national level. It has replaced in part only the role that was once played by the Chiefs of Staff committee of long standing. This in no way means that the requirement for a Chiefs of Staff committee has evaporated; it just means that the military advice that we produce is transmitted through the CDS and the Secretary of State to the NSC.

The NSC has provided a forum where military advice is integrated with a host of other, sometimes competing, interests across government, not least among them the important views of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department

for International Development and often the Home Office. This means that senior military officers in Whitehall are routinely operating in a milieu that is more complex and more competitive than a discussion between military peers alone, and where politicians and senior civilian officials have the lead. The problem isn't new, but the forum is.

By now we really should be in no doubt that the National Security Council does not see itself as a body which confines itself to strategizing. Indeed it actively dislikes talking about matters which don't appear to have options from which to choose, or decisions to make that will lead to actions. It is, at least for now, cast primarily as an operational body that takes a hands-on, detailed approach to the conduct of the UK's security activities. It is now, by design and by choice, often events-driven and opportunistic, convened if necessary at very short notice and as regularly as the situation demands. It relies on a collegiate, hands-on approach from ministers, who are often required to take hard decisions in circumstances of considerable uncertainty and pressure. Their previous training and experience of this varies greatly, which is healthy for democracy.

This has implications for senior military leadership, though not really new. For a start it puts at a premium the way advice is conveyed to the political level so that it is readily understandable, even if rapidly constructed, and above all it must be accurate. There is nothing more damaging to confidence in senior military ability than offering advice at the NSC which, on probing, is found to be short on substance or accuracy. Of course it is not possible to offer a guarantee of outcome in many circumstances, but at least it is possible to be clear about what resources exist and what can be done with them. The military advice asked for is generally confined to questions about what could or couldn't be done, and there is little appetite for this to be extended to opinion about what should or shouldn't be done. That is a political matter, once the limits of lawfulness and policy are set.

So, now we have the NSC we need to grow military leaders and staff officials who recognise that often the ultimate destination of their professional wisdom and expertise will be a short intervention at that level. Once the NSC has decided, the conclusions constitute orders for which the same military leaders will then be held to account.

My second strategic level point is that today there is a clear appreciation that for the UK in the world in which we live allies are essential to anything but the very smallest intervention, such as a benign non-combatant evacuation operation. We have spent much of the last decade going to war alongside US Central Command in Iraq, and NATO in Afghanistan. Now in order to muster the military clout needed to make a difference in the world we simply must, as a priority, lean on NATO and make NATO better. This means that the way operations are designed should start from an alliance perspective, rather than have it bolted on afterwards, and there is a real premium on filling the posts that we have in the new NATO command structure.

It is not enough for our senior leaders to be good in their own national fast-lane, they must be effective in managing the subtleties and sometimes frustrations of the multinational military environment. Of course this also means it would help a great deal if we in Britain were to learn to speak more than one language. I also think that, following the requirement to do better with NATO, will be the opportunity to consider doing more for the United Nations. The position which we have held for some time that most United Nations operations were relatively simple affairs, and that many nations with perhaps less capability than the UK has, could successfully accomplish them, now needs to be challenged.

Even just this year the United Nations has deployed in the Democratic Republic of Congo a force which is really designed to fight. It includes artillery, a clear indication that it is a more demanding undertaking. So in the FF2020 era we may put more leaders into staff positions in UN operations and where we can take a slice of command, and it may also mean that, where capacity exists and the necessary permissions are granted, we are able to contribute either niche capability, or more complete capabilities to a particular operation. So my point is, leadership in FF2020 is going to be a truly international business at all levels.

My final point at the strategic level is to recognise the inevitability of the change in the way that armed forces are populated. We have tried really, really hard for a generation, but it is simply neither practical nor affordable to hold standing regular armed forces at the scale required to discharge all possible defence responsibilities in all circumstances. This is partly because the exponentially increasing cost

of manpower simply makes such an outcome unaffordable in all reasonable circumstances, and partly because in the absence of a clear existential threat to the UK at home there is no compelling case for investment in very large scale standing armed forces. Yes, the regular armed forces that we as a country choose to afford can, to some degree, mitigate for lack of mass and endurance through combat effectiveness and technology: and yes, affordability underlines the importance of investing elements of that force in forward engagement around the world where appropriate designed to help head off conflict. But, as size matters and endurance counts, we must adjust our formula.

So we are driven to look at new combinations of capability such as Special Forces, air power, enhanced surveillance and reconnaissance, and close coordination with proxy forces. Many of you will recognise that elements of that were tested in Libya, for all that was a very straightforward undertaking in the grander scheme of things. Of course a mix like this won't always work, but in some circumstances it may, and as such is a much less demanding proposition than the deployment of a complete force to do the job ourselves.

But above all we live in an age where a means of having a comprehensive and credible Reserve is essential. This will augment the activities of a smaller regular force, both in forward engagement and in terms of short notice contingency. But for me, the greatest virtue of a strong Reserve is that it provides the basis for the regeneration of capability in terms of mass and endurance should circumstances demand it.

One of the legacies of the past ten years is that we have lost many of the lessons and much of the expertise we used to have in understanding how to do mobilisation. So in the context of FF2020 and the present Reserve proposition I think it is important to balance the effort between on the one hand building a Reserve that is a credible part of daily activity and, on the other, sustaining a Reserve which is the way we can build bigger and better armed forces when the call to arms comes. It means that military leaders must be able to build a force that is a combination of regular personnel, and reserves, and if necessary citizens called up for duty. This of course is not new for the UK armed forces. The last century provided a number of notable examples when mobilisation has been achieved, but the current generation of

leaders are not familiar with the required actions. My own view is that if you look at the world around us today we should really get a move on with the full Reserve proposition.

I will turn now to leadership at the operational level, and I might start by acknowledging there is a question as to whether the operational level still really exists in the age of advanced digital communications. I think that question actually only arises because of the relative straightforward nature of recent campaigns in places like Afghanistan. There the construction of the force and the relatively low tempo, compared to full-on war fighting has made it easier to conceive how a military operation at scale can be closely and daily regulated by national capitals.

In fact, if you look at the problems which would exist in responding to a really bad outcome from the present drama in Syria, then you can see circumstances in which very large forces could become engaged in a very big fight. In those sorts of circumstances the operational level will clearly exist in the shape of a Joint Headquarters, sitting over land, sea, air, Special Forces and logistic components engaged in a complex and difficult undertaking. This would occur on an alliance basis to be determined, and potentially span a very large geographic area. So if you look at the potential responsibilities of someone like the US Commander for Central Command, or the US Commander for Pacific Command, or a NATO Joint Commander, then I think the case for having officers who can think and operate at the operational level of war very firmly exists.

There will be others in capitals who are sitting on the political - military interface at the strategic level, and many, many more who will be at component level and below operating at the tactical level; but we shall always need commanders who, can conceive, command and execute a complete campaign. I also accept that the operational level of command may still be required at a much lesser scale of effort, where the level of command is determined by complexity rather than by scale. As direct personal experience varies, I continue to assert that study of military history, reaching back over the ages, but perhaps studying leadership since 1914 in particular, remains as useful today as it has been throughout my service.

Let me turn finally to the question of leadership of future force 2020 at the tactical

level. Now this starts with the most junior officers and NCOs in all three Services and extends right up to three star officers operating at the level of component command. I think my first point is leadership at this level is very unlikely to be any easier than it has been for the last twenty years and it may turn out to be both different and potentially more demanding.

So the first thing we will need are men and women of strong character, with the intellectual strength to understand quickly and accurately the sort of challenges that they are really facing, rather than reaching for the template of the last twenty years or so. They will have to be prepared to master the complete tapestry of potential contemporary conflict, from counter terrorism at one end through to full state-on-state conflict at the other, as well as all points in-between, often managing the concurrency of a combination of types of conflict that change over time. So they must also be able to move very rapidly between any point on this spectrum and always recognise that they are operating in a highly competitive and brutal environment. Of course we forget the strength of the enemy's vote at our peril. It is very easy to say that we need to be able to operate at net speed, where decisions have to be taken at a rate which defeats an opponent who is also operating with very sophisticated technology-based decision support systems. But this is a tough level to play at.

Amongst the qualities that will be at a premium will be resilience whereby casualties are an accepted fact and setbacks are managed and overcome. Endurance, the capacity to keep going for as long as necessary, rather than say lasting only as long as the proposed length of a deployment, is likely to feature strongly. There will be the same premium as now on initiative within the precepts of mission command and the vital capacity for mature, sound judgement in a crisis. Neither come ready-made in any of us, but have to be developed.

If leaders of Future Force 2020 are to also succeed in the sorts of potential conflict that may lie ahead, I personally think that they will need to cultivate a greater capacity for disciplined aggression and genuine ruthlessness than we currently normally demand. We absolutely should not think that the demanding but mature nature of the current Afghan campaign, and perhaps its predecessor in Iraq, have provided a set of immutable benchmarks for the way war will be fought in the

future. I think we will have to be innately militarily hard and competitive to survive on future battlefields, let alone win.

It follows that we will need officers in particular who have a very high level of professional competence. The education and training they receive at universities, Sandhurst and Staff College is broadly on the mark I think, though right now we are in the midst of tuning up the Staff College courses.

The key for me as Commander Joint Force Command is to identify those officers who have developed such a high level of professional skill, so that the way they act under pressure is intuitive rather than by rote. That only comes with genuine commitment to learning by hard experience. It applies equally in all domains: Land, Sea, Air or Cyber. These same officers must, as I have alluded to already, embrace allies as a default setting and be completely committed to leading forces that are a combination of regular, reserve and civilians. They will be technically accomplished particularly in the use of information technology including social media. The latter comes naturally to the people who are joining now, but simple things like the ability to touch type and to construct a spread-sheet quickly should be seen, just as essential as the ability to wield a bayonet or a fountain pen once was.

It will also be normal for leaders to operate amongst civilian populations and in concert with a wide range of state and non-state agencies and actors. It is possible to conceive of conflicts being fought out by military forces in some sort of waste land, but obviously much more likely that operations will be in populated areas. This does not necessarily mean that the whole of a civilian population will be actively swept up in the fight. I think in many cases the fighting occurs around them now that greater targeting precision is possible, but it will mean that civilians will be an ever-present feature of the operational landscape.

If what I say sounds a tall order, then I think it really is. It would be nice to be able to wish away some of these hard realities, or to reduce the effort that you and others make to finding and preparing people who can thrive in this sort of environment. I just don't think that such wishful expectations will serve our country well enough, and so we had better redouble our commitment to being good at developing our leaders.

