



Looking around the world was the CDS Christmas lecture at RUSI

The new Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), Gen. Sir Nicholas Carter, was fortunate that his inaugural address to the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) was not overshadowed by other events. As it was, the parliamentary pantomime performance, scheduled for Tuesday, was postponed until Wednesday. Perhaps the performance at Westminster was symptomatic of the "uncertain strategic and political context" of which he spoke.

His remarks were a timely reminder to policy makers, who seemed to have other things on their minds, that the wider world is changing as we watch. His comments followed similar remarks made by MI6 Chief Alex Younger, speaking on 3rd December. In his speech, CDS spoke of a return to a multipolar world order, with "ambitious states" asserting themselves regionally and globally. This is in addition to the threat of terrorist violence, evidenced by the events in Strasbourg earlier this week, writes Nick Watts.

Complicating this picture is the way in which evolving technology is being adapted for military purposes, either by improving the capability of weapons and sensors, or by adapting IT to exploit vulnerabilities in the Critical National Infrastructure of nations. In this dynamic international environment, it is doubly important that the UK is seen to be a reliable ally and partner. As the government seeks to project Global Britain, this was a timely reminder that the armed forces have been in the global business since the Middle Ages.

CDS recognises that the armed forces must understand and embrace the uncertainty of both the changing world scene and technology. It must also connect with the society it seeks to serve. Recent publicity about mental health and PTSD, has tended to deflect the central message of what the armed forces are for. Similarly, the guerrilla battle against Lawfare is not yet over. Service personnel who face a knock on the door, because of a long ago incident, do not feel upheld by the government they served.

The challenges CDS outlined, are underpinned by the prospect of another Comprehensive Spending Review in 2019. Gavin Williamson the Secretary of State has sought to persuade the Treasury, via the Modernising Defence Programme (MDP), which is expected to report shortly, that MOD spending is not out of control. Some of the big capital projects, such as the Dreadnought programme, create financial pinch points, which only the Prime Minister can resolve. It must be hoped that the PM, newly emerged from her recent travails, feels sufficiently emboldened to put the nation's defence at the top of her agenda.