

By City Visitor

General Sir Mike Jackson was a distinguished fighting General who rose to become the "No. 1 Soldier". Now he has a book to sell, and is out in the defence network. As a critic, he suffers from the strong support he gave to the Government he served – and the journalists' noses he put out of joint in the going.

A recent outing was long on analysis, but short on prescriptions – with some of them written on the one hand and then on the other. He did however make two sound points which bear reflection.

The first was the delusion of the short, sharp war. He evidenced Northern Ireland – almost 38 years of the military holding the ring while a political solution worked through. He controversially conflated Gulf War 1 with Gulf War 2 – two tactical phases with a long operational pause sustained by CAPs of no-fly zones and the Armilla Patrol, 17 years and counting.

This was the context for his second, the elements of intervention "to put right something that has gone very wrong". He very clearly articulated the required elements to move a country to a safe and stable future: at peace with itself and its neighbours; institutions of state created, possibly from the ground up; the rule of law emerging; humanitarian problems largely resolved (including returnees); the economy back on its feet and supporting people; factions disarmed and perhaps integrated into a national army.

One wonders whether those giving the orders for intervention have things spelled out to them so clearly on one side of paper. If we are to be committed to 20-40 year wars then perhaps the public also should be trusted with information about the possibility of the "long haul" to achieve the desirable outcomes.

And if they did, then we might overmatch the strategic endurance of adversaries who think (sometimes rightly) that tomorrow's tabloid headlines will sap our national resolve and hand them back what the "hot" war took from them.