

Speaking at RUSI on 14th December, the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) drew attention to the fact that the rules based international order is being challenged. In the annual lecture at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach highlighted the importance of military relations in a politically turbulent world. He outlined a world of threats and risks, and argued that the UK still has a leadership role to play in many of the organisations of which it is a member; the UN, NATO, the Commonwealth and the OSCE. Sir Stuart drew attention to the policy adopted by Syrian and Russian forces in the siege of Aleppo, of deliberately attacking medical facilities, as an example of how internationally accepted norms are being challenged. Nick Watts reports further for Defence Viewpoints on the next page.

He also drew attention to attempts to limit freedom of navigation, which have occurred in Asia. He believes that this should be challenged as unfettered access to sea and airspace is essential to modern commerce. Likewise the rise of non-attributable cyber activity by state actors needs to be monitored and checked where possible. He also mentioned threats posed by the behaviour of states, in particular naming North Korea as posing a risk to regional security.

CDS drew attention to Russian activity in communications and disinformation; he said that some commentators have alleged political subversion. But, he added, it is not a secret that Russia is using cyber as part of its national armoury. The UK he said should pay more attention to counter espionage and counter intelligence to protect our national interests. Sub-state conflict in the Middle East also poses a threat to the international order. CDS said that he was worried about the global reach of Daesh as an idea and the potential for copycat style attacks. There is now a potential network of experienced fighters who are now moving in migrant flows.

It is in this world of political turbulence ♦state on state competition♦ that the UK can deploy its full spectrum response to get upstream of the threat. He suggested that this could include the use of such assets as medical services. The UK♦s ability to produce military doctrine, which helps to inform NATO doctrine, was noted as a real plus in terms of the UK♦s influence within the Alliance. The UK♦s ability to offer military assistance, as part of a wider diplomatic effort was also offered as a good example of where military effort can supplement ♦soft power♦.

CDS reminded the audience that as far as protection of the UK was concerned, Defence is part of an integrated effort involving security and police activity. The unheralded Military Standing Tasks continue: Continuous At Sea Deterrence (CASD) has been on-going for 48 years. In the past year Britain♦s armed forces have been involved in 30 operations with some 6,000 people employed. CDS drew attention to Op. Shader, the air campaign against Daesh, which has seen UK aircraft undertake 1250 strikes. In addition there is capacity building for the Iraqi armed forces; there are 500 personnel in Afghanistan. The UK will shortly be sending an Armoured Battle Group to Estonia as part of NATO♦s enhanced forward presence.

CDS suggested that in the near future the UK could find itself part of a ♦club within a club♦; groups of like-minded nations. He drew attention to the Northern Group which began life as a political idea. Now this group has a military meeting every year. There is no treaty, but it is a useful opportunity to liaise with 12 nations; its HQ is at Northwood. UK Defence, he concluded must be more international in outlook and how we operate.

Backing this up CDS called for industry to embrace a spirit of innovation; he said it is ok to experiment and fail. He said that more SMEs are being encouraged to get into defence. He reminded the audience that Defence sponsored 19, 000 apprentices annually, the largest group of apprentices in the UK. To maintain the level of service personnel CDS mentioned that the MOD was examining terms of service more in keeping with the lifestyle of those born in the 1990s

which is the rising cohort of recruits. This will see a blend of regular, part-time and reserve service.

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