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Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives

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A Liddell Hart Approach to Peacekeeping

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Introduction

This year marks the 10th anniversary of this series of lectures in memory of Captain Basil Liddell Hart. It may be thought somewhat curious that a man whose thinking was so central to the development of modern theories of warfighting in the inter war years, the man who some believe was the inspiration behind the Blitzkrieg, should this evening be the subject of a lecture on peacekeeping. But I believe that if Liddell Hart were alive today, his mind would surely have moved at the end of the Cold War to consider operations short of war. It is therefore of some interest and value to reflect on how he would now be applying his theory of the 'indirect approach' to the subject of conflict resolution through peaceful means as we approach the next century. Indeed, I believe that he would have felt entirely at ease with the concept of peacekeeping, for, as Professor Alex Danchev explained, he abhorred war which he regarded as a 'monstrous fraud'. How then would Liddell Hart have approached the difficult subject of peacekeeping? This is what I wish to talk about for the next forty minutes.

Background

First I think we have to look at the geo-political situation in which he would find himself today. I do not think that he would have been surprised by the failure of the new world order, promised by George Bush, to materialise. After all it was he who predicted the Korean War in 1945. He would see for himself that the history of the post Cold War years has generally been one of disintegration and conflict. Deep rooted ancient rivalries, based on national ethnic and religious differences have been rekindled as political structures break down or disappear altogether, with catastrophic human consequences. Today there are some 26 major conflicts in the world, all of them taking place in regions where nation states have ceased to exist. As Edmund Burke said, "Civil wars strike deepest of all into the manners of the people. They vitiate politics, they corrupt morals; they pervert even the natural taste and relish of

equity and justice". The consequences in terms of human suffering of these civil wars make chilling reading. Some 36 million people have become refugees or displaced persons in order to escape the horrors of these wars, and in the Great Lakes area of Africa, during the past three years, the world has witnessed the greatest mass movement of populations that has ever occurred in the history of mankind. Some quarter of a million people are killed each year in these conflicts, and half of these casualties are thought to be children. 2000 people are killed or maimed by mines each month. Since 1945, it is estimated that 22 million people have been killed in war. There are some 55 million Kalashnikov rifles on the loose in the world today. All this is happening in a world which currently has a population of some 4 billion people. Before the middle of the next century, there will be some 10 billion people in the world. Yet already the civilised world seems incapable of developing any sort of coherent response to this threat of large scale human disaster.

I think that it would have been obvious to Liddell Hart, a man of great practicality, that we cannot afford to stand aside and hope that things resolve themselves without our involvement, for in the same way that "No man is an island", no nation can isolate itself from the global village, which this planet has become. Nor would he have seen the solutions to such cataclysmic events necessarily coming from the belly of an aircraft or the barrel of a gun. He would have understood that dealing with complex emergencies, giving hope to the oppressed and dispossessed, needs, or rather, demands a greater understanding of what it takes to sustain the condition of mankind. The solutions are therefore more likely to be found in the preservation of the fundamental elements of civilised society, notably the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.

Today it is also clear that wider peacekeeping - looking after civilian populations through the delivery of aid in a situation of war - is an undertaking which lies at the tougher end of the spectrum of military activity, and is one which, because of the absence of any great thinkers like Captain Liddell Hart, in my opinion deserves to get a better hearing than it currently does. The soldier's plea that he joined the corps of an Army not a Peace Corps is no longer appropriate. As Dag Hammarskjold said, in an earlier, simpler era of peacekeeping, "it is not a job for soldiers but only soldiers can do it". As we come to the end of the twentieth century, it is clear that armies everywhere need to review their defence strategies if they are going to be able to respond appropriately to the changing nature of conflict which will occur in the next century. It is particularly important to world order that the USA, the only super power, stays engaged. Europe is not sufficiently integrated yet for there to be a common defence or foreign policy, and as we have seen more than once this century, in Europe and elsewhere, without the USA there can be no permanent peace. Since 1992 NATO has also come to realise that its future lies as much in peace support operations as it does in deterring general war. Having said all that, I think that Liddell Hart would have shared my belief that our armies should remain primarily able to fight at the intense, hi-tech end of the spectrum of conflict, and then downshift for operations short of war. Too much peacekeeping is surely bad for your military health!

The international approach to peacekeeping has evolved greatly since United Nations peacekeeping operations first started in 1948 with the United Nations Truce Supervisory Organisation (UNTSO). Since the end of the Cold War, however, although the opportunities for peacekeeping have become wider, the means by which these complex operations can be mounted have not yet been sufficiently developed, neither materially nor conceptually. This imbalance has, between the aspirations of the international community and limitations of peacekeeping, undoubtedly discredited the concept of peacekeeping. Perceptions of failure in

Bosnia and Somalia and the Great Lakes area of Africa have also greatly damaged the reputation of the United Nations. Yet if we collectively or individually lose faith in either the concept or the undertaking of peacekeeping operations, then the world will become a considerably more dangerous place than it is at present.

Moral dimension

Before I try to set out new doctrines and concepts of peacekeeping operations which in my view accord with Liddell Hart's indirect approach, it is important that we clearly understand the basis on which nations have the right to intervene in one another's affairs, both from a legal and moral aspect. The principle of non-intervention under article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which establishes the equal sovereignty of all nations, is central to international law. Yet today the international community finds itself increasingly doing just that under article 39, Chapter VII, on the grounds that where nation states no longer exist, where civil wars that are in danger of spreading are taking place, where there is a dire need for humanitarian aid, or where there are gross violations of human rights, the UN has a duty to intervene.

More difficult to answer are the moral questions posed by such interventions. To which crises should we, the international community, respond, and which ones should we ignore? We cannot act as a world policeman everywhere, nor is it appropriate to intervene in all crises. I do not suppose that the British would have been particularly pleased to see blue helmets of the UN deployed in the streets of Belfast in 1969. Nor must we allow the media to determine our policy. Boutros Boutros-Ghali once referred to there being 16 members of the Security Council, the 15 national representatives, and CNN. Can the international community develop a more reasoned, morally based decision making process beyond that of national self interest? The emotional response of 'we must do something' is not a sufficient mission statement for a commander in the field. Or should we work towards preventing such situations in the first place? And finally, if we do decide to act, how far should we allow peacekeepers to get involved in peace enforcement operations?

1998 was the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and we have recently seen growing in importance the added imperative of a need to uphold the law of international human rights in the context of peacekeeping operations. The role of organisations such as Amnesty International and the lessons that they teach regarding the international law of human rights simply can no longer be ignored by any country or army today. As the Secretary General wrote to the Security Council in 1993 about Angola, "Respect for human rights constitutes a vital, indeed a critical component, among measures to resolve, on a long-term basis, conflicts of this nature, including efforts to promote enduring conditions of peace, national reconciliation and democracy". Sadly, human rights for millions have come to mean having six foot of earth piled on them - if there was time.

Specific mandate

The first military requirement and probably the most obvious one, is that peacekeepers must have a clear, unequivocal mandate which is backed by adequate resources and the political will of the international community. This is something that all military men will ask for but is rarely forthcoming, even less so in an organisation such as the UN in which there are 185 different nations, each with their own political agenda. However, 'Just do something' is not a mission statement that is very helpful to military people. It is therefore most probable that military commanders will always have to do what I did, and pluck from the often

contradictory United Nations Security Council Resolutions (743 -990) their own mission statement which was: to sustain the people of Bosnia in the midst of a three sided civil war, try and bring about the conditions necessary for a peace agreement and to contain the conflict within Bosnia.

It is my contention that this mission was indeed accomplished in a most heroic way by the 23,500 young men and women who volunteered to go to Bosnia as peacekeepers and risk their lives so that others could live in peace -- or, indeed, could live at all. That the opportunities for peace were ignored by the political leaders of Bosnia can scarcely be blamed on the UN. As you will be only too aware, it is still those same political leaders who are blocking political progress today. The suicide rate in Sarajevo today is sadly as high as it was during the war. Nevertheless 2.7 million people were sustained by the UN throughout the conflict, and over 2,000 metric tons of stores a day were delivered to even the remotest parts of Bosnia along roads built by the UN and using airfields operated by the UN.

The second part of the mission was also achieved, as after the deployment of the UN into Bosnia the casualty rate from the war dropped from 130,000 in 1992, to 30,000 in 1993, to around 3,000 by 1994. Far from presiding over genocide as a number of propagandists would have us believe, UNPROFOR was able to halt the genocide and create the conditions for a peaceful resolution of the problem, initially by bringing about a peace between the Muslims and Croats in the Washington Agreement. This agreement had to be implemented by the UN in the same way that the Dayton Agreement was, but of course they had to do this in the midst of an on-going civil war, whilst also at the same time accomplishing all their other tasks. The conditions were also laid ultimately for the Dayton peace agreement. And finally the conflict was indeed contained within Bosnia with only minimal spill-over into other parts of the Balkans.

The lesson from all of this is one that I believe would have appealed to Liddell Hart and is that peacekeeping, like any military operation, needs a mandate which clearly defines the limitations as well as the aspirations of the international community. It cannot deliver political or military solutions. It can only help create the circumstances in which a peaceful settlement can happen. This represents the indirect approach at its best. There is no involvement in the war by the peacekeepers but they provide the means to sustain the people and the state caught up in civil war. They do not become combatants themselves imposing a political settlement by force of arms.

Use of force

Nevertheless, in order to achieve the successful outcome of a peacekeeping mission in the conditions of the new world disorder, it is obvious that any peacekeeping force has to be extremely robust in its use of force, and the UNPROFOR was no exception. Millions of rounds of small arms, tank main armament, artillery and mortars were used, as were airstrikes by NATO aircraft. However in any peacekeeping mission there are clear limits on the use of force, and this is what distinguishes it from war fighting. For every time that force is used, there will be a halt to the flow of aid, and people at risk in need of that aid will immediately start to die. This is a consideration that all commanders in any humanitarian based operations must take into account when ordering force to be used, especially where the level of consent on the part of the warring factions may be patchy at best. The difficult question to answer is how much can a peacekeeping force, even one as militarily robust as NATO, use force in peacekeeping operations in conditions of civil war without crossing the line into war fighting.

It will certainly be using a great deal of peace enforcement under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

Thus at one end of the spectrum it is obvious a very forceful approach to peacekeeping is needed in such conditions in order to sustain a humanitarian operation in terms of the delivery of aid, the maintenance of total exclusion zones or even to deter attacks against safe areas. On the other hand it is equally obvious that a peacekeeping force can never become a combatant itself. You do not go to war in white painted vehicles. Whenever force is used, it must clearly obey the basic principles governing the use of force in a peacekeeping mission. The force used must be specific to the aim of the mission, only a minimum level of force should be used to achieve that aim, and the use of force should be even-handed and impartial. Force cannot be used to punish an aggressor, or to obtain a political solution. Indeed it is wrong to suppose that any peacekeeping mission can solve the underlying political problems of a country by its presence. It can merely create the conditions for political action. What is vital is that war fighting goals are never pursued by peacekeeping forces as happened in Somalia, and also as people tried to do in Bosnia in an attempt to impose the political goal of a just peace by the use of air power.

There are always going to be limits to what can be achieved even by air power in peacekeeping operations. For example, you cannot enforce the passage of a convoy by air power, when that convoy is blocked by women and children. Furthermore I believe that the change in the strategic balance in Bosnia that did occur between the warring parties during the summer of 1995, came about more from the attack by Croatian ground forces which seized the territory that the Bosnian Serbs wished to trade for peace on their terms, although I suppose that the NATO bombing campaign did have some psychological benefit through the strong political signal sent to all of the warring parties.

However, even within the limitations of a peacekeeping mission, I firmly believe that in all circumstances a force must be organised and equipped as a war fighting force, able to conduct peace enforcement operations from its very first moment of deployment, commensurate with the highest point of the spectrum to which one might reasonably expect to have to escalate in a 'worst case scenario'. This includes command and control arrangements, training and equipment, and logistic support. This will make it a far more resilient mission than UNPROFOR. This is a very clear lesson for the future. With hindsight it is a tragedy for the people of Bosnia that the NATO and UNPROFOR did not deploy in the reverse sequence!

Regional powers: complementary not a substitute

Following on from this it is clear that the role of the regional organisations such as NATO in support of peacekeeping is likely to become more important in peacekeeping operations in the future. Notwithstanding the difficulties encountered, I believe that bringing in NATO in support of the UN was a major step forward in peacekeeping, and indispensable to the continued exercise of the UN mandate. For it was the presence of NATO aeroplanes in the skies which gave peacekeepers the confidence to deploy in dispersed and remote places, and, of course, it was NATO helping to preserve the total exclusion zones for heavy weapons around Sarajevo that also deterred attacks by the Bosnian Serb Army against the safe areas for so long.

However problems did occur, partly because of the difference in mandates between the two organisations. The UN had an essentially humanitarian mission, whose long term aim was to create conditions for peace. NATO is of course a military organisation, whose mandate in essence is the application of force and which wished to use force to bring about a political solution. This made the dual key arrangement inevitable, as I guess will always be the case where there are two chains of command active in one theatre of operations.

We must never again allow two independent organisations with two distinct mandates to operate in one theatre again in this way. Ultimately it was the reluctance of NATO to act impartially as a peacekeeper which finally led to the withdrawal of the UN . It may be that it was time for this to happen anyway, but peacekeeping was not given the opportunity or universal political support that was necessary for it to be successful. I believe that such an opportunity existed in the Spring of 1994, and that if it had been exploited, then the added suffering of the people would have been avoided.

Campaign plan: need for taut chain of command

In any humanitarian based peacekeeping operation, there is always going to be a need for close co-ordination between the three aspects of the mission that will always be present, - the aid delivery programme, political action and the security operation. A campaign plan based on a common strategy and chain of command is vital if such co-ordination is to be achieved. Even the Non-Governmental Organisations see the advantages and will become involved. Furthermore, a close relationship between the three elements will obviously make it easier to deliver aid, rehabilitate health services, make assessments of needs, and facilitate the work of the aid agencies by creating a benign security environment rather than one in which fierce battles rage. Thus, if the peacekeeping mission through its presence and powers of persuasion can get the parties to cease hostilities, or at least to reduce the intensity of the fighting to a level where aid can flow freely, then clearly this will improve the delivery of humanitarian aid. Without proper co-ordination between political action, the humanitarian mission and the supporting security operation there can be no real progress. It was the separation of the political action from the two other elements which was the main cause of difficulty for the UN mission in Bosnia.

Finally, a campaign plan can only be executed effectively if there exists a taut chain of command, able to deal with strategic, operational and tactical issues at once. The three levels of command - the strategic (the UN's New York headquarters, capitals of the troop contributing nations and other international powers, and Brussels), the operational (Zagreb and Naples), and the tactical (on the ground in Bosnia) - will all be compressed and will often issue contradictory advice or orders which must be quickly reconciled. I established a regional brigade level of command finding the manpower by reducing the size of the main UNPROFOR HQ which up till then was trying to deal with the tactical and operational level of war simultaneously. I also moved the reduced HQ to Sarajevo which was the centre of gravity for the mission. Once we introduced a taut structure, we saw the performance of the HQs improve immediately, as did the flow of humanitarian aid.

Effect of the media on policy making and peacekeeping

The war in Bosnia has been described as a war of information and mis-information, a war for the sympathy of the world in which the media itself all too often became manipulated by the propaganda machines of the protagonists. The influence of the media on a peacekeeping

mission is critical, as what is reported and seen on TV inevitably and directly affects policies being developed abroad as well as attitudes within the country where the peacekeeping force is deployed. General Boyd commented, "Conventional wisdom over what is happening in Bosnia is stunted by limited understanding of current events as well as a tragic ignorance or disregard of history".

If the media falsely shows images of war, exaggerates facts or distorts opinions, there is a very real danger that international policy will be based on propaganda, not on the realities in theatre and the advice provided by commanders on the ground. In the UNPROFOR Campaign Plan, the attitudes of the people were considered the vital ground for the peacekeeping mission, and a main effort was made to change perceptions both at home and abroad. I think Captain Basil Liddell Hart would have approved of the appearance of the Coldstream Guard Band at a football match held in the Kosevo stadium under the guns of the Serbs. It was a demonstration to the world, that the war was not necessary and that normality was possible. It was a subtle use of the indirect approach.

Leadership

In the dangerously chaotic situations which prevailed in Bosnia, the UN mission simply could not have continued without outstanding leadership particularly at the junior levels of command. All leaders however, from the top to the lowest levels, needed to believe in, and understand, the essential humanitarian elements of the mission. They needed to understand that it was they, the peacekeepers, who stood on the moral high ground. Men and women who face danger and death need inspiration, not insult. They need to know that their sacrifices will not be in vain. Being accused of being accomplices of genocide, or adding to the suffering of the people, being told that you are as bad as the enemy by the protagonists in the war can lead to disillusionment with the mission. However, I never heard anyone in Bosnia who was involved in the humanitarian, peacekeeping or political action ever question the value of the mission, although I frequently heard propagandists do so. The reason for this is simple. Keeping entire populations alive and preventing further horrors of ethnic cleansing not only put the UN on the high moral ground, but also had its own rewards.

The way ahead

If the international community is going to be able to respond better to these sorts of complex emergencies in the future, then the UN which of course expresses the collective political will of the world, will have to redefine doctrine, create new structures, develop its technical capabilities and define clear training objectives. It is here that I separate myself most strongly from Liddell Hart's thinking. In *Deterrent or Defence* he argued strongly for the establishment of a standing UN peacekeeping force capable of deploying at short notice to trouble spots around the world. This in my opinion is a highly mistaken view, for such a force would rapidly get out of date as the technology and disciplines of war evolved. Although there are political complications in getting nations to contribute troops, at least they will arrive in theatre operationally capable. No UN standing force could have produced the capability of NATO in IFOR. A number of countries have anyway recently launched the concept of standby forces including a Brigade HQ which is currently planning responses to different contingencies, preparing staff tables and defining probable logistic requirements. This seems a far better way to proceed than Liddell Hart's idea of a standing UN force.

Training

Clearly we need to set peacekeeping training standards and requirements which relate better to the new operational circumstances. We also need to establish an inspectorate for peacekeepers so that those who are offered up by nations for peacekeeping duties are proved capable of performing the tasks given. I believe that Liddell Hart would have made an excellent Inspector of Peacekeeping Forces! Ideally, we could tie into this inspectorate an arm which would determine the equipment required by contributing nations, especially those who normally arrive in theatre minus even the most essential personal equipment.

Doctrine

We also need to keep on refining its peacekeeping doctrine as new circumstances arise which will incorporate the latest lessons from peacekeeping missions around the world. General Nash said in Bosnia, "I have trained 30 years to read a battlefield...now you are asking me to read a peace field. It doesn't come easy. It ain't natural. It ain't intuitive. They don't teach this stuff at Leavenworth." Only through the development of a dynamic doctrine will the UN be able to create a common international understanding of the new challenges facing peacekeeping. Liddell Hart would surely have been central to this process.

Technology

Finally, technologies in the area of surveillance, precision guided weapons, and communications need improving, not least if we want to ensure that we can if not compete with, then at least keep up with the communications developments of the media. We must make better use of the recent developments in mine detection and clearance techniques, as well as in our ability to transfer large amounts of equipment and supplies by air to even the remotest corners of the globe.

Conclusion

General Chassin once wrote that Captain Liddell Hart was the "greatest military thinker of the twentieth century, whose ideas have revolutionised the art of war". If he were alive today, I suspect that Liddell Hart would have been similarly described but as someone who had revolutionised the art of peacekeeping. He would have been part of, in the words of Dag Hammarskjold, "the frontline of a moral force which extends around the world...whose successes can have a profound effect for good in building a new world order".