

The UK: Manchester City or Accrington Stanley?

“Britain is a third rate power nursing illusions of grandeur of its colonial past”

I.K Gujral, Prime Minister of India 1997

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SDSR 2020: A vision for the future or a cost-cutting exercise?

"We have passed beyond the era in which peace and war have beginnings, middles and ends. We now inhabit, probably permanently, a twilight universe in which nations wage a constant invisible cyberstruggle, testing each other's defences, launching occasional mayhem, stealing each other's secrets..."

Max Hastings writing in the Times on 14th December 2019

Last February, Prime Minister Boris Johnson launched what he described as the most comprehensive review of the UK's foreign, defence, security and overseas development policy since the end of the Cold War, stating this to be "*a defining moment in how the UK relates to the rest of the world*".

Unfortunately, given the calls on the public purse occasioned firstly by Gordon Brown's overspending, then by the financial crisis, then by BREXIT and now by the COVID Emergency, this is probably not the best time to be calling for additional resources to bring into being a new and properly funded programme for Britain's security and a new vision of its place in the world, unless of course this is just a cunning plan to inflict further cuts on the UK's defences, rather than a recognition that **we are spending nowhere near enough on defence and national security**.

And nowadays, national security is about a lot more than how many frigates we can muster, as the Max Hastings quote above suggests: New types of defence against new threats mean more spending on defence and national security. Moreover, while we shore up our fortifications, we must also somehow invest heavily in offering all the peoples of the world hope for the future by mapping a pathway towards a peaceful alternative, a goal everyone can aspire to and work towards. At the moment, this simply does not exist.

A completely different narrative will be required to restore defence, security, international aid and foreign affairs to their rightful place at the top of the government's agenda, an agenda which is known to, and fully supported by, the public. The cynical claim by a senior Conservative some years ago that there are no votes in defence only works up to the point when disaster strikes or something kicks off and then the voting public will, hypocrites that they all are, turn to government and expect everything to be in place. The provision of PPE for the current emergency is a case in point.

At the risk of sounding faintly ridiculous, I am a patriot who takes it ill when his country gets itself into difficulties and so feels moved to offer an opinion during exercises such as this. Accordingly, this is a layman's contribution to the 2020 Strategic Defence and Security Review, in which a **higher priority for defence and national security** is advocated, together with the creation of **a new independent watchdog, a new global alliance** and suggestions as to how we might pay for it. While best endeavours have been used to marshal the arguments, what follows is my opinion; simply because I believe something to be so, does not make it so.

Good luck with it all.

David Green

25th August 2020

The Quest to provide the best possible Guarantee of Safety

The British infantry is the best in Europe. Fortunately for us, there is not much of it.
Marshal Bugeaud 1811

The above quote attributed to one of Napoleon's French Commanders epitomises the conundrum faced by a long line of Britain's adversaries across the centuries and it now sums up the defence dilemma facing today's Government. In the matter of defending our realm down through the ages, it seems we have invested in quality but have overlooked the fact that quantity is also needed to put any desired military outcome beyond doubt.

The last major occasion when our military was called upon to put an outcome beyond doubt on its own was the 1982 Falklands War. In the Official Handbook of Britain for that year, the Defence Chapter states: *"Despite its economic difficulties, Britain...is increasing its defence efforts to the level required to provide the best possible guarantee of safety."* At that time, we spent 5.2% of our Gross Domestic Product on our military and defence costs for 1981-82 were 11.8% of government expenditure.

Today, thanks to nearly four decades of cuts in military spending by politicians of both Labour and Conservative parties in good times and bad, defence expenditure is now only just above 2% of GDP, representing a mere 6% of government expenditure. The world today is far less secure than it was in 1982 and in any case the Falklands conflict of that year demonstrated how international crises can develop with bewildering speed.

National security constitutes a unique and particular responsibility of national government but all too often in the past, politicians have raided defence budgets to fund other pet projects. Consequently, there have been too many occasions in our history when we have over-relied on the courage and improvisational skills of our military personnel to compensate for inadequate equipment and manpower.

While level of expenditure does not tell the whole story inasmuch as it is possible to waste money or spend less more effectively, the question remains that, if *"the best possible guarantee of safety"* required 5.2% of GDP and 11.8% of Government expenditure in 1982, how can we possibly be adequately defended today on a current expenditure of half the 1982 level, when the Planet today is arguably in far greater turmoil than it was 38 years ago?

The following table of defence expenditure as a percentage of the UK Government's Budget at half a dozen points over a hundred year period clearly shows that military expenditure has received a progressively smaller slice of the budget cake since the war and now stands below the 1933 "appeasement era" level:-

Year	1913	1933	1953	1973	1993	2013
Budget %	21%	8%	29%	13%	10%	6%

We are about to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, when the vision and courage of a few men, some modern warplanes and a smattering of cutting edge technology snatched victory from the jaws of a defeat we so richly deserved at the hands of the Nazis, courtesy of the short-sighted cost-cutting decisions of 1930s' politicians. Do these lessons need to be learnt all over again?

The UK: Manchester City or Accrington Stanley?

“One of the recurring themes of Foreign Policy over the years has been the notion that Britain ‘punches above its weight’. This boxing metaphor says much about Britain's sense of identity: national pride is tinged with a suspicion that we don't quite deserve our place at the top table of world affairs.”

The Open University

Let's start with an audit of our nation. The UK comprises a reasonably healthy and educated population which enjoys the benefits of a welfare state run by a democratically elected government; our island status has protected us from hostile land powers over the ages and enables ready access to maritime resources and trade routes; our temperate climate delivers a bounteous supply of fresh water and seasonal weather which enables us to grow 61% of the food we eat (we could grow more!), and our location on the planet has spared us the extremes of major earthquakes, volcanic activity, storm and flood.

There are 66.8 million of us, making us the 21st most populous nation in the world; centuries free of invasion and civil war have enabled our institutions to become well established and respected; we are the sixth highest spender on defence, maintaining armed forces which include a nuclear deterrent, a blue water navy, state of the art fighter aircraft and an army of 110,000; the global dominance of our English language enables us to wield considerable “soft power” overseas; while the days of Empire are long gone and the Union Jack no longer flutters over countless government buildings worldwide, we are still a rich nation, currently ranked the 6th most prosperous out of 195 nation states worldwide. While we will soon be overhauled by a host of other nations, this will not be so much the result of our becoming poorer but of other nations becoming richer.

We are not without our problems, of course. Our education, health, legal and welfare services are creaky and we have allowed our institutions to fossilize; BREXIT has exposed the adversarial manner in which we prosecute our politics; the UK brand has taken a battering of late thanks to our under-resourced antics in the Middle East; we are picky about the jobs we do and how productively we do them; we waste resources and have become a nation of shopaholics, racking up private debt on the acquisition of consumer junk which falls to pieces almost as fast as it falls out of fashion; finally, the National Debt had been increasing year on year, a shameful inheritance for us to bequeath our children. Even so, all these defects are well within our gift to solve, improve or change. No nation is completely self-reliant but we are better placed to determine our own destiny than most.

In the 2016 Referendum, there was much talk about the UK's power and influence abroad, which is a fixation of the political class. While the post-war British public seemed to have been quite unaffected by the loss of the largest empire the world had ever seen, the British political establishment had, in the words of 1950's US Secretary of State Dean Acheson, *“lost an empire but not yet found a role”*. Today's UK politicians still seem desperate to have power and influence on the world stage, and there is frequent reference to “punching above our weight” which has, if the truth be known, landed us in so much hot water over the last few decades, as is evidenced by our adventures in Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan.

If we think of it at all, we Brits recognise that we are a rich nation and so have a shared responsibility for global welfare. We are content to help and defend other nations who are not as prosperous, but we want our money well spent and oppose alliances that jeopardise our independence and a clear conscience. We seem happy with our place in the world as we slide slowly yet gracefully down the various global league tables monitoring wealth and influence – perhaps not Manchester City any more, but certainly not Accrington Stanley.

The Military, Politicians and Public Perceptions

*"For it's Tommy this an' Tommy that, an' chuck him out, the brute;
But it's "hero of his country" when the guns begin to shoot."*

Rudyard Kipling

The military are the people governments call in when the political profession fouls up. The need for armed services stands testament to the continual failure of politics and its subsidiary, diplomacy. Moreover, armed forces embody the sort of reach, professionalism, discipline and raw power that politicians can only dream about.

So perhaps it is hardly surprising that, across the decades, governments of all persuasions have at best been wary of the military and have contrived to restrain expenditure on both personnel and equipment in a public service which is largely abroad, or confined to barracks, or out to sea – in any event, out of sight and out of mind.

I can remember a time when we seemed to have lost interest in our military altogether. I recall attending a Remembrance Day Parade in the late 1970s when I heard a local senior politician remark that he did not think that Remembrance Day Parades would survive into the 1980s. The pathetically small number of people who turned out to watch the procession appeared to bear out what he was saying.

But then we had the Falklands War. Subsequent campaigns in the Balkans, Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan changed the public perception of our armed forces and what we call on them to do. We are now aware of, and anxious about, conflicts we are involved in and we connect with our soldiers, airmen and sailors in a way we didn't seem to during decades of Cold War because, while the stand-off with the Soviet Union was serious enough, there was nothing much to see on the telly and there were hardly any casualties. Well, there is plenty to see now, courtesy of hoards of camera-packing journalists, 24/7 news and the internet. Moreover, social media enables the disgruntled squaddie to let us all know directly about his defective rifle or his melting boots.

Very little of this instant news is positive and this makes military action by a democracy difficult. Any wars entered into by free countries ought to be prosecuted until the adversary is defeated or forced to the negotiating table. The problem is that 24/7 news can breed a war-weary lack of resolve amongst public and politicians, and an unwillingness to finish the job, as happened in Iraq and Afghanistan. It begs the question as to whether we could have fought – let alone won – World War 2 if we had had the level of media coverage then that we have today. Would, for example, the 1939 sinking of the Battleship Royal Oak in the poorly defended harbour of Scapa Flow have ended the political career of the Minister responsible for the Navy at the time – a certain Winston Churchill – if Robert Peston had been around then? Instant news is here to stay but we need better discipline on the information superhighway; today's journalists must allow politicians time, space and even mistakes to solve complex issues. The likes of Churchill, Bevan and Lloyd George would not have lasted five minutes in today's political arena, where soundbite journalism and social media demand instant - and invariably the wrong - responses.

In this political environment, defence, being long-term and low profile, rarely gets a look-in. While our armed forces enjoy considerable public goodwill, this is not translated into support for their being adequately resourced because nobody is out there batting for them. I believe most people would be shocked at how little is spent on defence and how little the political establishment seems to care. It's in everybody's interest that this changes.

A Review of Defence Reviews

"We cannot assume that tomorrow's conflict will replicate today's".
Bob Ainsworth. Labour Party Defence Secretary Feb 2010

Well, at least Bob Ainsworth got something right before he left office! The thing is, do these once-in-a-blue-moon reviews serve any useful purpose? Are they anything other than an excuse for politicians to make further cuts to defence? What is the point of this exercise and how accurate can any predictions of the future be?

A review of reviews is instructive: When the SDSR of 2015 was published, we were still fully signed up to the EU and its common defence policy; during the 2010 Review, Islamic State did not exist; when the 1998 Review was published, few people had heard of Helmand; in the 1990 Review, all talk was of the end of the Cold War and the "Peace Dividend" that could be realised, with no thought of Gulf Wars! In 1981, the Nott Review countenanced nuclear war with the Soviet Union, rather than the World War 2-style conflict in the South Atlantic we were subsequently obliged to prosecute against Argentina. And the Healey Review of 1968 could not have imagined that the civil rights marches in Northern Ireland of that year would escalate into 30 years of sectarian violence which our troops would be called upon to contain.

Clearly, predicting what will be enacted on the world stage in ten or twenty years time makes about as much sense as predicting the British weather and yet these review exercises persist in the folly of trying to predict the unpredictable. In 2010, the Defence Review Document cheerfully stated that: *"No Soviet-style global rival to Western liberal democracy has yet emerged"*, conveniently choosing to ignore the giant panda in the proverbial living room.

Defence planning is not helped by the lead times involved in acquiring weaponry which is necessarily complex and expensive. You can't go to the armament industry's equivalent of Tesco and buy half a dozen destroyers off the shelf because you suddenly find yourself short, and that shiny matchless piece of kit you ordered 10 years ago may be weighed in today's balance and found wanting.

So, what are we to do?

ICONS: A proposal for a National Security Watchdog

"The British soldier can stand up to anything – except the British War Office"
George Bernard Shaw

Given their rather less-than-impressive history, perhaps we should review the continued usefulness of defence reviews. Far better, surely, to set up something permanent and a little more sophisticated which continually monitors our defence capability, ammunition stocks, personnel levels & morale and levels of national resource reserves.

Most important of all, whatever form it takes needs to be independent of the Government, which is why the National Security Council that was set up during the Cameron years isn't fit for this purpose. **So, I propose the creation of a national security equivalent of the Office for Budget Responsibility, the independent watchdog which was set up by David Cameron to monitor the state of the nation's finances.**

“The Independent Commission to oversee National Security” (ICONS) would have its own staff, office, and independence. It would be charged with gauging our military’s state of readiness and with identifying equipment & personnel gaps in our defences. It would also monitor and address any weaknesses in our cyber security. Its role might even be expanded to include an overview of the resilience of national networks such as the National Grid, of key stockpiles such as PPE, and strategic resources such as water, fuel, food production and electricity generating capacity.

ICONS would differ from other watchdogs in one key respect: once it had identified a weakness or a shortfall, it would put the Government on notice in secret, to give the authorities a chance to address the problem. A certain length of time would have to pass before the notice was put into the public domain.

ICONS’ existence would constitute a continual and public overview of our Government’s primary responsibility to keep us all safe, and would provide the means of obtaining an independent assessment of what would be required to provide and maintain “the best possible guarantee of safety” referred to earlier in this paper.

The Kit Conundrum and the Curse of “fitted for”

“Cost growth on the Type 45 Destroyers has whittled away many of the ships’ planned capabilities, as features and items were removed. These capabilities could be added later, but until they are, the Type 45s will be missing key features one would expect in a top-of-the-line modern destroyer, or even in a high-end frigate.”

Defense Industry Daily December 2013

No layman should attempt to comment on specific weapons other than in the most general terms. The technology of armaments is simply beyond the ken of the ignorant outsider because what one reads in the Daily Wail may not reflect what is actually happening in the necessarily secretive world of the MoD and the defence industries. For example, I can remember the acres of newsprint devoted to the shortcomings and cost overruns of the Typhoon Jet Fighter - particularly whether it should be fitted with a cannon or not - but in the event, we appear to have ended up with a world-class warplane. Hopefully the same will apply with the F35 Lightning II because, if one were to believe all the horror stories that have been published over the last decade, it would lose a dogfight with a Sopwith Camel.

How is the general public to know if the F35 is a flying brick or if the Queen Elizabeth Aircraft Carrier is nothing more than what the Russians have recently described as “a convenient target?” What can we do other than pay our taxes and hope the powers that be know what they are doing? Another reason to establish ICONS!

Anyway, here are some general observations on the vexed question of kit:-

In any debate on defence, we tend to concentrate overmuch on “big ticket” items, pricy platforms like aircraft carriers and destroyers, at the expense of the weapons systems, ammunition, equipment and personnel that go with them, with the result that stuff is ordered but, in order to contain costs, vital accessories are not fitted and ships and aircraft seem to end up “fitted for”, rather than “fitted with”, hence the observation quoted above.

The theme running through any debate on the UK’s military suggests that what defence we have is good, but there simply isn’t enough of it. I recall that, as the order for the

number of Type 45 Destroyers was progressively reduced from 12 to 6 by the last Labour administration, naval top brass protested that even the very best destroyer couldn't be in two places at once. Agreed, but it begs the question as to whether you need one billion quid's worth of warship just to maintain a presence.

Perhaps we are paying over the odds for under-equipped hulls and airframes in an endeavour to sustain our defence industries, who seem no longer capable of delivering economy of scale in a shrinking defence market. Maybe this is no longer sustainable and construction of large capital ships and expensive aircraft must be undertaken in the future as partnerships with our allies, as we are doing with the F35.

With economy of scale achieved, we then need to urgently address our shrinking number of military assets. For example, the Royal Navy had 50 frigates & destroyers at the time of the Falklands War, together with 27 attack submarines. Today's lamentable figures are 19 and 7 respectively. What on earth are our politicians thinking? It is not as if the boats that we have got are armed to the teeth; no credible anti-ship missile, not enough F35s for the aircraft carriers, not enough attack submarines to deal with surface threats, not enough Phalanx weapons systems to deal with swarms of hostiles – and that's just a few items from the Royal Navy's rather long shopping list, never mind the Army and the RAF!

At least it is possible to quantify deficiencies in conventional military forces. Cyber security is another matter altogether. Our capacity to defend ourselves and our friends seems impossible to quantify and the plethora of institutions that have been spawned over recent years to deal with this new threat hasn't helped. A 2019 Parliamentary paper suggests an annual budget of £1.9 billion but is this the whole picture and how can this be anywhere near enough? Another reason to establish ICONS!

And where's the extra Money coming from?

"Everybody is always in favour of general economy and particular expenditure"
Anthony Eden, Conservative Prime Minister 1955-57

It is incumbent on people who advocate spending more on defence, or anything else for that matter, to explain where the extra cash is coming from.

Anyone who thinks defence is expensive is invited to consider that, of the £928 billion budgeted to be spent by our government earlier this year, £285 billion will be spent on social welfare, £178 billion will be spent on health and £116 billion will be spent on education. Expenditure on the "Big 3" above totals £579 Billion, rather dwarfing the £55 billion spent on Defence – a mere 6% of the total spend. It ought to be possible to gently ramp up the military budget over the next two Parliaments towards a level consistent with delivering "the best possible guarantee of security" referred to at the beginning of this paper. The proposed ICONS would be tasked with establishing what this level would be, but it has been widely suggested that 3% of pre-COVID GDP would have been sufficient to plug most of the gaps in our defences. **Committing to defence spending at 2.5% of GDP within 5 years and 3% of GDP within 10 years using legislation similar to the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 would focus minds and reassure our armed forces as well as our allies.**

Of course, the COVID Emergency has since driven a coach and horses through the 2020 Budget and most voters would now expect the Government to depart from its rather facile manifesto commitments and exploit the crisis and current low interest rates to revolutionise

our society, our governance and our economy. Here, surely, lies a golden opportunity to fund mini development corporations in every town, to renovate retail and business districts, to create a multitude of local industries, to renew our infrastructure, to increase the percentage of food that is home-grown, to tilt our economy away from services toward manufactures, to renew our education, welfare and healthcare services and restructure our taxation system. Additional expenditure on defence would be part of this post-COVID recovery, as monies on new warships, weapons, equipment and additional personnel would help refuel the economy.

While the above would undoubtedly boost our GDP, thereby increasing tax revenues and our ability to service the National Debt, it would be wise to take advantage of voter expectation that a reckoning is due for all the money spent during the Emergency, so here is a chance to levy some new taxes which governments might not otherwise contemplate, such as **10% VAT on food**, which would easily generate an extra £10 billion a year. Further revenue might be generated by sweeping away hypothecated taxation such as local government tax, TV licences and local business rates, replacing them with increased rates of the mainstream taxes, and **a new Land Tax**, to ensure we have a reliable and sustainable source of revenues fit for 21st Century purpose.

There is another potential source of income for our defence budget. In 2006, NATO members agreed to aim to spend 2% of their GDP on defence. 14 years later, two thirds of NATO members are spending way below that level, including many rich nations like France (1.8%) and Germany (1.4%). While we are busting a gut to maintain our current level of defence expenditure, **the net underspend of freeloading NATO members is a staggering 94 billion dollars a year**. We are being taken for mugs and it is time for those paying 2% and over to demand some sort of financial recompense from those not paying enough, perhaps by means of a formula which enables the two percenters to claw back some of the underspend, while leaving sufficient to motivate the under-spenders to increase their defence budgets over time.

Even so, these measures alone will not be enough to address the debt burden from the past. As anybody who has allowed their credit card borrowing to get out of control will testify, it's not so much the principal sum that's the problem, it's the interest payable on it. Before COVID, overspending by careless politicians across the decades cranked up the National Debt to £1.8 trillion. Even with today's miniscule interest rates, the annual cost of servicing this borrowing is a huge £56 billion a year, the 4th largest item of government expenditure, exceeding the amount spent on defence. While this is barely manageable with interest rates on the National Debt currently averaging 3%, the cost of borrowing will surely increase in the future; we need to remember that, 20 years ago, Tony Blair's government was paying an average of 7.5% and Margaret Thatcher was having to cope with 10% in 1986. Servicing the Debt with rates of this order would cost us the NHS.

So, HMG needs to contemplate a bigger hit, not necessarily now, but certainly when interest rates bottom out, and preferably levied on capital assets, rather than income. Given the nation's total worth calculated to be £13 trillion of which £5 trillion is land, **a "one-hit" capital levy of 5-10%** would be sufficient to repay the COVID borrowing and bring the National Debt down to a more manageable level.

And an overhaul of our taxation system is not the only pressing matter; we need to re-examine our entire foreign policy portfolio which is outdated and predicated on the events of the last century. So there now follows some observations & ideas on foreign policy:-

The whole purpose of defence

*"We sleep safe in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night
to visit violence on those who would do us harm"*

George Orwell

We need defence for the same reason we need a police force – it provides protection against the darker side of human nature. However, while there will always be human depravity, there are measures that can be taken to contain crime and reduce the level of enforcement necessary. The rule of fair law, freedom of thought and action, and equality of opportunity to access wealth, welfare, education, and to participate in government are arguably all factors which minimize domestic criminal activity and constitute what is known as "liberal democracy".

Aside from domestic benefits, liberal democracy has advantages on an international scale inasmuch as free nations tend not to let disagreements with each other degenerate into war and are able to co-operate with each other because their systems of government and aspirations of their peoples are similar. So it makes defence sense that as many as possible enjoy the benefits of liberal democracy.

It follows therefore that, in addition to our national territories and interests, we ought to be defending liberal democracy. Perhaps this needs to be spelt out and given some much-needed focus because liberal democracy is currently very much on the defensive. After the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, the march of individual freedom seemed unstoppable. It was argued that a liberal democracy incorporating individual freedom and the rule of law was necessary to create the conditions for wealth generation. Unfortunately, Communist China has since proved that this is not the case and that, provided the mass of people can be bought off with a better standard of living, or at least the prospect of one, they will submit to authoritarian rule and forgo democracy and individual rights.

The 2019 Economist Intelligence Unit Index of Democracy makes depressing reading. This index ranks 167 nations according to their performance under five general categories; electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture. The following table gives the total numbers of countries grouped into 4 categories according to the 2019 survey:-

Regime Type	Number of Countries	% of Countries	% of World Population
Full Democracies	22	13.2	5.7
Flawed Democracies	54	32.3	42.7
Hybrid Regimes	37	22.2	16.0
Authoritarian Regimes	54	32.3	35.6

Barely 6% of the world's population enjoys the freedoms we Brits take for granted. This state of affairs demands a co-ordinated response from the nations whose democracies pass muster. Even those in the premier league, such as the UK (ranked only 14th out of 22) need to keep their democratic fabric in constant repair before they can begin to start lecturing the 52 countries in the second division about tackling the flaws in their systems of government, never mind the rest. There is a pressing need for a global body to champion liberal democracy, to provide a focus, a vision and a means of giving the world's people's something to aspire to. The question is, does it already exist or will it have to be created?

Proposal for a Global Organisation of Liberal Democracies

"It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried"
Winston Churchill

Politicians are very good at creating institutions and tiers of government but not so good at ensuring they are cost-effective or continue to serve a useful purpose over time. Today's world order is now quite different from the one that pertained after WW2 and I believe the international political scene could do with a thorough spring clean. We could lead the way.

Should we look to the one existing all-inclusive international institution - the United Nations - to deliver individual freedom? Ideally the UN would be the means to address all global issues but in reality it is not up to this particular task. It has justifiably been described as the TUC of national governments, some of whose credentials on civil liberties leave much to be desired. As a result, when push comes to shove, the UN is an institution which never ceases to disappoint. So, we need to acknowledge the UN's shortcomings and consider an alternative grouping which can currently master the global tasks for which the UN is currently unsuited.

Could the Commonwealth fit the bill? Unfortunately, while this worthy and global institution once had the potential to become a powerful multi-cultural brotherhood which could have achieved co-operation in everything from trade to defence, we allowed the Commonwealth to languish over the decades. In any case, the Economist's Democracy Index reveals that many member states could hardly be described as Liberal Democracies.

A globalised NATO, then. But even this alliance has become creaky. While it seemed ideal for the Cold War, all it had to do was organise and strike a military posture that was sufficient to discourage the Soviet Union. There was no fighting. But once NATO partners found themselves waging a land war in hostile territory as part of ISAF, it is fair to say that some proved rather inept about it. Moreover most NATO countries are not spending 2% of GDP on defence as was agreed at the Iceland Summit in 2006.

As for the EU, quite apart from its European pre-occupation, that its governance is hybrid, that it fails to make the distinction between unity and uniformity, and that it cannot defend itself, it is fast becoming an international irrelevance: even its own reportage admits to a declining global proportion of GDP and market share, together with a shrinking population that by 2050 will represent only 4% of the world total.

I believe we need something new. It needs to be global, exclusive, with membership restricted to those liberal democracies that are prepared to commit a certain percentage of their GDP to international security and to aid, as their membership fee. If they haven't got the troops or the equipment, they pay the balance due to those members who have.

The UK should lead the way in going for G.O.L.D. – a Global Organisation of Liberal Democracies, starting perhaps with a core membership of ourselves, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This would not be a union or federation: in GOLD, each member nation would have their own economies, currencies, language and systems of government and welfare. Members of GOLD would commit to defending themselves and each other, and they would commit to improving the welfare of their peoples and those of prospective members, whose admittance to the club would be accompanied by aid, trade agreements, security and civil society development packages. Aid is thereby targeted, a nation-by-nation means to a liberal democratic end.

G.O.L.D. : The best Defence against angry Gods and Nutcases

"By building relations we create a source of love and personal pride and belonging that makes living in a chaotic world easier"

Susan Lieberman, Author

What has civil society got to do with defence? Everything! Peace and good order is all too often taken for granted but it relies on the fabric of civil society and the human interaction it generates, which must be fostered, protected and kept in constant repair. Otherwise, there is a danger that we will end up distanced and alienated from each other, our experiences limited to what we see on an edited screen, doing everything remotely and making choices for everything from politicians to pizza on some on-line device, while wealth and the means of producing it is vested in the hands of fewer and fewer people. In this way humanity is devalued, alienation festers and the chance of violent dispute is increased.

Armed forces have to deal with the consequences and they now have to operate in a world where fighting invariably takes place in areas populated by civilians who are more savvy, more informed, more educated and more demanding of, and less reverential toward, authority than they were, say, in WW2. Civilians also have access to an unprecedented range of goods, fuel, vehicles and information which can readily be improvised by disgruntled citizens against military forces. The technology gap between governed and government is certainly a lot narrower than it used to be, so the goodwill of the local populace is surely vital to facilitating any military operation.

To this end, the creation of G.O.L.D would give a much-needed pro-active focus to what defence of our collective and individual freedoms are all about. It would not just be a reactive regional defence pact with no final objective. Nor would it be a rich nations club where membership indicates "job done". For example, the UK may be a democracy but it is hardly a glowing example for others to follow, as is evidenced by abysmal levels of voter engagement and archaic electoral practices. Moreover, we have not been a full democracy for that long; up until 1918, women were disenfranchised and a century before that, only 5% of the entire population had a vote.

Liberal Democracy is always a work in progress and we are on the same road as, say, China, but further ahead, thanks to nothing more than accidents in history. Moreover, in exporting the liberal democratic model, we must avoid making the mistakes we made in Iraq and Afghanistan by naively assuming that a ballot box could substitute for order on the streets and a reliable water supply. Democracy is the icing on the cake of civil society.

Humanity prospers when people feel that they belong and are involved. In particular, civil society thrives best in a Liberal Democracy where participation, diversity and social interaction foster desirable human traits such as industry, thrift, kindness, respect and love. And here lies the best guarantee of safety. While there will always be the occasional nutcases whose angry Gods order them to commit atrocities against those who do not follow their "true way", minds that hate in truly Liberal Democracies will stand out like the proverbial public convenience in a desert and can therefore be easily contained.

Our world is changing at bewildering speed as hundreds of millions of people in a host of developing nations demand a standard of living that we take for granted. If we Brits are to survive, let alone prosper, in this challenging environment of burgeoning populations and shrinking resources, we must make common cause with those nations who think as we do, while bringing into the fold other nations whose people aspire to our values and freedoms.

The State of the Union towards the End of this Elizabethan Era

“When people say England, they sometimes mean Great Britain, sometimes the United Kingdom, sometimes the British Isles, – but never England.”
George Mikes

Throughout this paper, the term “United Kingdom” or “UK” has been extensively used but it seems we are not as united as the terminology suggests, that we have rather taken the Union for granted and have allowed the fabric of a well-loved institution to unravel for want of attention and repair. While nationalism has always been bubbling away on the celtic fringes, decades of careless UK governance have devalued and undermined the whole concept of the Union – even within the English regions - and all the post-war cosy assumptions that the UK is generally a good thing are now being called into question.

Perhaps this is logical and inevitable. Perhaps time and tide may have already cost us Scotland in much the same way we lost the South of Ireland. As grievous as this loss would be to many of us, we do need to keep this in proportion. After all, England is home to 84% of the UK’s population and responsible for 85% of the UK’s GDP; moreover all those living in England are not English; thanks to centuries of inter-marriage and migration; we are all mixed up together; today, what’s British are our values rather than our race. So even without Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Union and its flag would still be relevant and would still be a viable entity, the 9th most prosperous country on the planet.

Even so, a concentrated effort should still be made to save Scotland for the Union if we can, and promote the advantages of the Union for the rest of us. For a start, existing British institutions should be given a higher profile; our armed forces have already been mentioned, then there’s our foreign aid programme, the British Council and national treasures like the British Broadcasting Corporation. Other ideas are as follows:-

Institute a UK Day – a new bank holiday, an excuse to get the union flags and bunting out and to celebrate Britishness, say, on the last Monday in June, and possibly as part of a re-organisation of public holidays, featuring long weekends at the end of each month between May and September to boost the leisure industry, and as an alternative to some of the existing dank and cold winter and spring holidays.

Replace the House of Lords with a directly elected House of UK Nations and Vocations, a different, less partisan and more talented cross section of the British community representing the nations and the regions, but nominated by the professions, with not a single party politician in sight!

Create a British Community Development Corporation, which would be funded by the UK Government and tasked with the setting up of mini-development corporations in towns and city communities throughout the UK, to restore central retail and business districts, to boost training, create jobs, and to breathe new life into local communities with new and renovated housing projects. It is envisaged that up to 20 such mini-DCs would be set up each year, to operate for a duration of 10 years, each with an annual budget of £20 million.

Bestow an existing or a new UK/British honour or decoration on every NHS and care home worker in recognition of their services during the Covid Emergency.

Build Airship Britannia! After the decommissioning of the Royal Yacht in 1997, there have been many calls to replace her with a new vessel to provide a platform for overseas

visits by trade delegations and a morale booster, but all have so far been discounted. Even a proposal to kit out the first new Type 31 Frigate for such a purpose didn't get past first base. Perhaps shipping is just too slow to be useful in these fast-moving times. An airship would be another matter. Helium-filled lighter-than-air craft have come a long way since pre-war hydrogen-filled airships, with a British company - Hybrid Air Vehicles - currently leading the way with a design for the "Airlander 50", an environmentally-friendly 120 metre-long leviathan that can transport 60 tons of freight or 400 passengers up to 4,000 miles, using battery electric propulsion in all or in part. Government support for the construction of "Airship Britannia" would showcase our struggling aerospace industry, and, sporting a huge union flag on its massive fuselage, would make an impression overland, overseas, anywhere from Berlin to Beijing in a way that no seagoing vessel could hope to match. Airship Britannia would not just be a morale booster; it would be a showstopper.

Re-brand the National Insurance Number to be described henceforth as "the Britpin" The register of NI numbers is arguably the most complete and up-to-date record of the British populace. By issuing the numbers at birth or when a person is accepted for citizenship, this record could become the key identifier of a person's membership of the British community, evidence of the taxes they pay, the national services they receive and the means of having a say in determining the extent of those services and taxes through the ballot box. Moreover, rather than just stumble into adulthood with no recognition by the State at all, 16 year-olds might henceforth receive a piece of parchment at a ceremony at their place of education in recognition of their adult British citizenship.

These measures need to be accompanied by **a new narrative which refreshes the case for the Union** and which goes something like this:-

"The UK is a large family, large enough to command influence and enjoy the benefits of economy of scale, but not so large that democracy loses traction and freedom of the individual is compromised. We are practical but progressive, evolutionary rather than revolutionary, and, while much remains to be done, we have come along in leaps and bounds over the last two centuries. While most of our Regency ancestors lacked a vote, secure shelter, adequate sustenance, education and healthcare, and had little say in their own lives, let alone anyone else's, two hundred years of welfare and institutional reform have changed the UK beyond recognition. Once working people gradually acquired the power to change their lives and everybody else's, the Union Flag that had previously stood for Empire and subjugation now proclaims Commonwealth, individual liberty, democracy and opportunity for all, together with the clout to deliver it both at home and abroad."

I don't think that this has ever been spelt out and it is particularly urgent that someone speaks up for the UK Family now because, by the nature of things, the current Elizabethan era is drawing to a close, and it could either go out on a high or precipitate a mindless frenzy of change for change's sake, a proverbial throwing out of the baby with the bath water. Many are fearful for the future, as the pace of change appears to accelerate and technology seems to overwhelm our capacity to comprehend it. For all its faults and foibles, the UK has the history, reputation and capacity to provide a reliable and reassuring beacon of stability, continuity and human connectivity for the world's peoples to follow through the tumult of the 21st Century, but this can only be achieved if the UK is itself self-assured, confident, optimistic for the future and comfortable in its own skin.

I fear that, at the moment, it is not.

David Green

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