Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

The Future of the British Army

Moderator:
David J. Berteau,
Senior Vice President and Director of the International Security Program,
CSIS

Speakers:
General Sir Peter Wall,
Chief of the General Staff, British Army;
Stephen Flanagan,
Henry A. Kissinger Chair in Diplomacy and National Security,
Nathan Freier,
Senior Fellow,
International Security Program

Location:
B1 Conference Room
Center for Strategic and International Studies
1800 K Street, NW
Washington DC, 20006

Time: 1:00 p.m. EST
Date: Wednesday, January 16, 2013

Transcript by
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.
DAVID BERTEAU: Let’s see if – yes, mic check is working fine. Ladies and gentlemen, please take your seats. Webcast is on. Can I get a thumb’s up from the video crew? Thank you. Obviously, welcome. So welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. We’re delighted that you could be with us today. We’re in between storms and – which has been our wont. We like to have events that are weather-challenged as bookends.

Welcome also to those of you, our viewers on the web. Increasingly, we use these venues to reach a much broader audience, not just a Washington-based audience and not just people who get sick of commuting through the traffic downtown, but also to reach a global audience. And I know we have viewers from at least five continents already on the – on with us this afternoon – probably a couple from Afghanistan.

Welcome to the CSIS Military Strategy Forum as well. This is an ongoing series. It is underwritten by generous support from Rolls-Royce North America. And we’re very grateful to Rolls-Royce for that support. We couldn’t do this series without them. We’ve had sort of a subfocus over the last few years on British defense and the British military and, in particular, the British Army.

About two and a half years ago we had General Houghton who here rolled out the initial strategic defense review and the initial results there in the fall of 2010. Last late summer, we had General Nick Carter on this way to Afghanistan, but he gave us some preliminary insight into Army 2020 and some of the impacts and reductions and the thinking that had gone on as part of that process.

And we’re really grateful today to continue that discussion and actually refine and focus it a little bit more. We have with us General Sir Peter Wall, who is in fact the chief of the General Staff of the British Army. General Wall was commissioned in 1974. He has seen service and – in all of the remaining parts of the British empire, as it went during that time, from Belize and Rhodesia to Hong Kong and back again.

But he’s really in a position now at a critical time at a critical moment, not just for Britain but obviously for the entire, what we used to call, Western alliance. And I think – you know the procedures here. I’ll ask you to make sure you silence your cellphones so that they won’t interrupt as you go. Following his presentation of remarks, I’ll engage with him on the stage here in a short discussion with a couple of questions then we’ll turn it over to questions from the floor.

As has been our practice, those questions – you will write and submit those questions on your notecards. You don’t have to wait until we’re finished to write the questions. You can write them as you go. Hold them up. Our staff will collect them. We’ll have Colonel Nate Freier and Dr. Steve Flanagan will be the questioners, if you will. They’ll collect your questions, merge, meld, integrate them and refine them so we get the maximum amount of questions on the table and we let General Wall escape with as little intact information as possible.

So without any further ado, please join me in a warm welcome for General Sir Peter Wall. (Applause.)
GENERAL SIR PETER WALL: David, thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, greetings. Is that too loud? All right. It’s a great pleasure to be here, following in the footsteps of Messrs. Houghton and Carter – both still doing great things for the army. General Houghton’s the vice chief and – of defense and General Carter is currently in Kabul as General Allen’s deputy. He was here in the context, I think, of talking about the way in which we’ve been trying to reshape the British Army to cope with the, let’s be frank, rather unwelcome prospect of having to downsize in the face of fiscal challenges – something that is not entirely unfamiliar in other parts of the world. Looking at where the army sits at the moment, we really got three major projects of our agenda.

The first is operational, and that is to continue to optimize our contribution in Afghanistan, a place I visited just before Christmas. And I can recount that the sort of progress that’s being made and the benefit that’s being delivered by our forces is remarkable, something that’s very encouraging. It’s been hard earned, hard won this progress, as you all know. We – the U.K. Task Force, is sitting under command of the U.S. Marine Corps in southern Afghanistan. And there’s a really very strong prospect that the Afghan security forces will increasingly take ownership of an operation that will succeed. Of course, that has to sit alongside governance and economic development and a number of other strata of activity, not least in the counternarcotics space and so on and so forth, to sort of continue that success.

And there’s a reasonable prospect of that happening with us having, you know, the best part of another two years of being able to mentor and assist alongside of that Afghan-led effort, which is increasingly seeing them in the van of everything, planning their own operations and so on and so forth. But the big questions are, as ever, in counterinsurgency on the political track. And everybody will have their views on how that might play out, but it seems to me that the prospects of that coming to a softish landing are as good as we have been able to envisage them for, you know, some time.

The army’s also found itself doing operations at home, something that doesn’t happen all that often – particularly as, you know, our presence in Northern Ireland is now down to an absolute minimum. But we found ourselves producing several thousand people more for Olympic security than we might have imagined – an operation that, on the face of it, coming on the back of Afghan deployments, wasn’t the most attractive option for our soldiers, but it did turn out to be a remarkable success and something that has allowed the army to reconnect with people at home. And when I say the army I should include your Marines and the other two services in that same phenomenon.

So operations is still front and center of what we’re trying to do. Indeed, I would say that the – you know, the army’s challenge is not so much transformation but transformation whilst delivering operations and whatever demands are thrown at it. I mean, all armies would say that. Transformation is a key feature, the second in my list. And the third is rekindling our contingency capability in a way that befits the modern era. I think, you know, the age of innocence in contingency, the sort of things we might have done in, you know, corners of world at short notice in the pre-Iraq era in a sort of force for good basis – I think the world’s moved on from there.
I think that our potential adversaries, even in our – in the flanks some something like a humanitarian operation, will bring capabilities to bear that are born of the lessons the insurgents and the asymmetric forces have drawn from our activities in Iraq and Afghanistan. So the game has changed and I’ll talk about that a bit more later, time permitting, because I want to allow plenty of time for your questions. The policy backdrop to the sort of resource picture that the British Armies had to contend with came out of the 2010 Strategic Defense and Security Review. That was the first defense review we’d had for 12 years. As a consequence of that, I think we will find ourselves in a – in a sort of legally-enforced quinquennial type of defense review, the next one being in 2015.

That came on the back of some quite considerable political and cross-Whitehall weariness at the enduring campaigns that we had been involved in since 2003, still are in Afghanistan, and the sense that the appetite for enduring military engagements elsewhere in the world had sort of run its course, and there was considerable merit in trying to be a – mount operations without actually having to put boots on the ground by taking a slightly more remote or standoff or proxy approach to the way things might be done, and of course, it was also cast against the backdrop of serious fiscal pressures, and that led to – inevitably to a reduction in our resources, reduction in our manpower, which I’ll come on to in a minute.

Offsetting that sort of 2010 sentiment of, you know, enough is enough, and the days of adventurism, you know, should be over, has been a steady stream of interesting conflict situations: Libya, other elements of the Arab Spring, what we’re seeing going on daily on our television sets in Syria – massive cause for concern, but with no immediate, clear-cut ways in which we might get involved to assist – things going on in Somalia, where we clearly – Western nations have a political leadership role to perform in support of the president of Somalia, which indeed, he has requested, but also quite a lot of training support for the AMISOM nations who are actually making a big difference there, and then most recently, the French deployment to Mali are all indicative of the fact that trying to blot out the prospect of getting involved in these sorts of fast-moving situations is not likely to stand the test of time.

And there’s certainly no real sense that the world’s a safer place. That’s not why we’re – we in U.K. are reshaping our investment in defense and reducing the amount of manpower in defense and in some areas – some other areas of investment. We’re doing it, frankly, to cure what we hope is going to turn out to be a short-term fiscal problem.

And when all that’s going on, one inevitably turns increasingly to one’s alliances and partnerships to make sure that collectively the powers that want to act together in these sorts of situations to support one another in their mutual interest, can do so as effectively as possible from a military perspective. There was all these headlines that came out of that review, which took about a year and a half to get to its full fruition after several short bursts of review, where a 20 percent reduction in the Army’s manpower from around a hundred thousand to around 80,000 accompanied with a 50 percent uplift in the Reserve.

And I should just add at this point that the U.K. Reserve is, you know, very much a – based on its sort of Cold War style; it has contributed about 10 percent of our contribution in Iraq
and Afghanistan consistently and very reliably, but it is not – doesn’t quite have the utility that you would attribute to the reserve in United States forces. And I guess what we’re looking to do is reform our reserve to be something that’s more similar to what you have here.

A tautening of our equipment program whilst trying to retain some balance – the political decision to sort of regroup the Army in U.K. – probably for first time for many centuries by removing our residual presence in Germany by 2020. We’ve still got the guts of a division, two brigades, a logistic brigade, divisional headquarters – 20,000 people in Germany at the moment. And in fact, the ones that are next out to Afghanistan are mounting from Germany. So it’s very much part of our operational contribution. It’s not still fighting a sort of hangover from the Cold War, which is the way that some people have sought to portray it, but it will save us quite a lot of money when we’ve managed to rehouse it in U.K., which we plan to do.

All this has been accompanied by a very significant change in the way that the funding of the services in defense in relation to the Ministry of Defence is organized, with, on the first of April this year, some very significant delegations of responsibility for equipment sponsorship and for capital equipment spend and equipment support spend not being run in the sense of – but being delegated to the single services in what we call the front line commands. So that is probably turning the clock back in U.K. acquisition parlance by several decades – real opportunity for us to work out how we can get the utmost capability by being able to take those decisions in-house rather than trying to influence the sort of center of the MOD to do it. Experimental, but very welcome.

And all of this accompanied with no real change to our ambition, particularly in terms of retaining a wide range of capabilities or be it in some areas the capacities within those capabilities might be – might be tweaked. The Army’s response to this was, in the face of a 20 percent reduction, is – was to very quickly work out that this was a new game which needed a complete rethink. This was not something we were going to do by downscaling our previous model and sort of eking out efficiency savings; this needed a fresh start, and we were fortunately afforded the time by the MOD to really go offline for a year to get by in that year’s financial processes on the assumption that we would – we would provide an affordable solution.

We sort of studied history to find out how the British Army had done this, and indeed, other armies had done this sort of reform before, and people like professor Hew Strachan from Oxford and some others are very helpful in advising us on this, and concluded that successful reforms of this sort to armies like ours – and including ours – had been achieved through ensuring strong political buy-in for the things we’re trying to do, and not just for the proposition, you know – you will reduce by 20 percent, but actually, for the ways in which you’re going to implement that, you know?

I hadn’t realized that that was going to be quite such a sort of testing area – that we needed an architect for this change, and we needed strong leadership and we needed to be prepared to be unpopular, including internally, that consultation was going to – in terms of asking what the sort of young Turks in the Army are thinking about, life was going to be very, very important, but of course, that sits in tension with the sort of compartmentalized way you might want to do this work without, you know, people starting to run agendas against you,
particularly on the more difficult aspects of balance between (inaudible) capabilities and all these sorts of things, and above all, you really needed time to think and get the plan made.

General Carter, who spoke to this forum last year, was the man who was the architect working direct to me as the head of the Army Board and sort of working all the propositions through, and I basically decided that – we decided that we wanted to retain full-spectrum capability. We wanted to be able to produce a war fighting division in a (core/corps?) context, as well as all of the other facets of modern military operations, but that’s the sort of top-end demand that we had to have an Army that will continue to attract talent. I think we’ve noted that any organization that is shrinking, but essentially wants to live with more or less the same outputs is going to have an even higher demand for talent than we have at the moment – at the moment, and that’s considerable. And we’re able to service that requirement because people find operational service very attractive, but we need to be able to sustain that with the right offer, that we needed to obviously maximize our capability and avoid a sort of sense that, well, 20 percent less resource means 20 percent less effect, because that clearly is not going to work in a world that’s certainly getting not 20 percent less dangerous for us – that we wanted an adaptable, agile force that could actually engrain in its psyche the sorts of lessons that we had found quite hard to make in Iraq and Afghan context in the early years, if I’m really honest.

Clearly, we had to fit to the affordability numbers, and this was going to be an integrated force where regulars and reserves were not separate, but they are part of the same force structure. And I particularly wanted to avoid any sense of a two- or multi-tier Army, where, you know, you would have haves and have-nots in terms of access to resources, to challenge, to adventure, to attractiveness to serve. Otherwise, General Carter had a blank sheet of paper. (Laughter.)

He came up with a very innovative model that basically said, well, if we’re going to cover all these bases, we have to, first of all, have ready forces in the shop window that can do the traditional type of contingency, whether it be light, medium or heavy forces with ready logistics, ready enablers and so on, and the wherewithal and plugins to the multinational scene and to the other services to get them there and be part of a successful joint fight.

But for the rest of the spectrum, we were going to have to sort of step back and have an adaptable force that, given time, would change its structure and mode of operation to the demands of the moment. And to an extent, all our armies have always done that, but we were making a – and a distinct division between those who were going to be in the adaptable mode and those who were going to be moving faster, and he came up with three core tasks for the Army. The first really being contingency capability, which is a sort of a modern-day extrapolation of what we’ve conventionally done as a – as a (inaudible) – deterrence force capable of deploying worldwide to invest much more in what we in U.K. parlance call defense engagement, but this is really sort of the lexicon for upstream capacity building, relationship building with regional partners, increasingly to give us a sense of what’s going on in regions and have a better upstream feel for the places we might get sucked into, but preferably to provide regional capacities to mitigate the prospect of that being necessary; and then finally, a much stronger line of engagement within the U.K. with the nation to ensure that we can continue to draw people in the Reserve and deploy in operations anywhere, worldwide or at home, with, you know, national buy-in and an understanding of what the Army was about. And the sum of that,
of course, in the case of reforming the Reserve is about having the right relationship with people’s employers, whether public or private sector.

This plan was all announced last July by Philip Hammond, our secretary of state, and went out pretty well across the Army, and so I think was seen to be a reasonably imaginative and pragmatic solution to what had been quite a challenge. Six months on, we’re getting into refining the plan and implementing the early parts of execution of it, recognizing that whilst this is, you know, called Army 2020 and it comes to fruition in 2020, it’s going to be tested on any day when it’s required, between now and then. And it’s essentially on an evolutionary path to that sort of end state. And it – you know, this is not a pinpoint position we’re trying to get to. It’s more of a concept that will have to evolve with the challenges of the time the way that conflict evolves, world events and, you know, perhaps even more fiscal pressure.

We’re well into redundancy programs, and working out how to rebase ourselves from Germany, which is a real opportunity to get ourselves into a taut and more affordable sort of configuration not only in terms of our geography and infrastructure, but also the way we manage our training vehicles, fleets, training activity, all that sort of stuff. Big changes to the Reserve, which will require legislation and will require a bit of a cultural change in our relationship with employees, as I was saying, to grow this contingent capability which inevitably, at the moment, is an interim one, pending the return of our sophisticated new – (inaudible) – for Afghanistan form that theater – which, you know, very similar challenge to that which my U.S. Army interlocutors today have been expressing, very important that that equipment which has been developed on the (hoof ?) to meet these sort of most modern challenges we face, is available to be employed in a sustained way as part of a core program. You know, ours has been bought with – from a sort of Afghan perspective in terms of numbers, in terms of sustainability, in terms of training systems, and we need to sort of enshrine that in our core capability, to start to develop this defense engagement capability which, frankly, where the demand is growing even before we’ve had a chance to sort of recalibrate ourselves. And there are plenty of opportunities in the current sort of threat climate in the Gulf, in East Africa and in parts of Eastern Europe driven by the wish for people to grow capabilities that are compatible with our modern way of operations, and I think most importantly, perhaps, to define what we want of our partnerships. And of course, that’s one of the reasons I’m here this week talking to General Odierno, because we will have to be solving some of these problems with a greater mutual reliance than perhaps we even had in the past. And if you look at our recent sort of portfolio of operations, nearly all of those have been done anyway in a coalition context, but the – I mean, I think this is becoming less and less optional for all the reasons I’ve alluded to.

We looked very firmly to NATO, of course, as front and center of the U.K. defense effort, assuming, you know, strong U.S. engagement and leadership of NATO, but we also look with – to bilateral relationships elsewhere in Europe. And you all, you know, read about the post-2010 initiative for us to get closer to the French military, which we’re in the process of doing. And I see that – provided it’s done, you know, within a NATO-compatible framework – to be entirely consistent with everything else I’ve described.

We are looking particularly to our U.S. senior partner to be able to benchmark our capabilities against what U.K.-U.S. components will want of us, in this business of trying to be able to generate a war-fighting division, our best effort to (slot ?) into a U.S.-led enterprise.
We’re obviously looking for very close force development links, and we’re looking for all of the things you would naturally expect to flow from the continued assumption of common interests and values and applying those in — you know, the uncertainties of the modern world.

I think it’s fair to say that the, you know, U.S.-U.K. relationship has been long-standing and born of particular particularly strong relationships in things like intelligence, nuclear, increasingly cyber. And, you know, in terms of the maritime/air industrial base, there is not quite the same industrial connectivity, guaranteed pragmatic, practical interplay in the land/space. It’s for us to create that, and that’s one of the reasons I’m over here talking to General Odierno and his people.

And I’ve had, you know, very encouraging discussions about the way in which in the post-campaign era, we can build on the very strong common understanding that has been so hard-earned with the U.S. Army primarily, but also, you know, noting that from history and serendipity that we tend to very often end up operating alongside or under command of the U.S. Marine Corps as well, to work out how we enshrine these into a — into a common peacetime habit such that the next time a call comes, we continue to be a very useful ally in the British Army.

So that’s the end of my piece, and I’m very happy now to field your questions.

(Applause.)

MR. BERTEAU: (Off mic.)

GEN. WALL: Thank you very much.

MR. BERTEAU: This will let everybody even on the right-hand side of the audience, or maybe they’re left. You raised a number of very worthwhile points that are — I’d like to ramble a little bit and pursue with you a bit here. And while we’re doing this, our audience may come up with some additional questions, and I see some of them are already being forward up here to Nate and Steve.

Let me start, though, with kind of the U.S. role in this process, if you will. You’re right. You point out we’ve had, you know, a special relationship for more than a century now, and we’ve really relied on one another in ways large and small over that time.

What role has the U.S. played in your discussions? I know there have been consultations, but in fact, it strikes me you may actually have a leg up on General Odierno. You actually know what your floor is now. It’s not clear to me that he knows what his is that he’s going to reach here, at least until the next iteration, if you will. But what kind of advice and interaction have you had from the U.S. as you figured out particularly what do you want to protect, what do you want to — what do you want to make sure you still have the capability of as you go forward?

GEN. WALL: Well, I think we want to make sure, first of all, that we are able to have a very frank and active discussion about the evolution of capability. This isn’t about, you know, drawing a line in the sand, putting a nail in the wall, a fix — a snapshot of a fixed point. This is about a habit of taking force development in the context of, you know, evolving modern conflict together. So it’s basically to have conjoined thinking.
There is always then going to be a resource-driven extent to which we can own our own capabilities or be very frank about those places where we would need to ask for support, or if we’re going to be part of a sort of conjoined effort. And you know, the – there have been, you know, countless examples where our ability to participate in the sort of ambition I’ve described has depended on some various generous support from the United States, whether logistics or surveillance or the network or whatever, but – and of course sort of shared intelligence and so on. So I think it’s – I think the opening point of this discussion is about common thinking, common education.

MR. BERTEAU: And you pointed out that in some ways this is easier to do with air and maritime forces, because they’re platform-based, and you can integrate at the platform level, if you will. For ground forces, it’s a little bit tougher, because you’re actually equipping rather than the other way around. And so the basis of integrative thinking, it seems to me, has to be a little more strategic and a little less platform-oriented.

GEN. WALL: You know, I think – I think it’s also the – just the way in which the dice have rolled. We don’t have at the moment, you know, a mutual dependence on the same industrial base.

MR. BERTEAU: Right.

GEN. WALL: We don’t – we do have some common research programs and so on and so forth, but they don’t – they don’t sort of clutch us together in quite the same way that, for example, F-35 does in the case of the Air Force, or, you know, the, you know, some of the other more exotic capabilities do in other – in other walks of –but that’s not to say that we don’t have an awful lot, perhaps – at least as much, if not more of late, than the other – than the other environments’ experience of operating under the same umbrella.

MR. BERTEAU: That’s a very powerful point. And you mentioned building partnership capacity, which of course, has been a strong emphasis the U.S. Defense Department, as well. From CSIS perspective, this is – there’s a flipside to this, which is where you already have that partnership capacity, such as what we have here, it’s worth looking at preserving partnership capacity as well as – as well as building new partnership capacity.

GEN. WALL: I think that’s right. And of course, we tend to think in terms of, you know, capabilities and that sort of thing, but I mean, I think it’s very interesting that we have – we had a lot of help from TRADOC. We’ve grown into the habit of our, you know, young major staff courses spending – this is all of the majors in the army, several hundred a year – coming and spending a couple of weeks at Leavenworth, for example, with their American equivalents. Not the sort of thing we were doing 10 years ago, not the sort of habit we’d wish to lose; it’s a tremendous opportunity.

MR. BERTEAU: Right, that’s part of that capacity, if you will. It seems to me, though, that Britain has a challenge that’s a little bit different than the United States, as well. On the one hand, you’d like to build on, strengthen and retain the special trans-Atlantic relationship with the U.S.; on the other hand, it’s probably more important to build up and strengthen the relationship with Europe, as well. And is it possible to do both? Of course, you’ve got the examples – in
fact, you cited a number of them – engagements with the French, most recently in Mali – is there a British role in the – in the Mali exercise? Does that help manifest something?

GEN. WALL: Well, I think – I mean – there are a number of sort of points wrapped up in that. I think the first thing is that I don’t think that we can afford to get into a position where any of these sort of bilateral relationships create sort of mutual exclusions elsewhere. We’ve got to be able – we can’t – of course, we can’t to be good everywhere. We’ve got to be selective, we’ve got to prioritize, and in a sense, that’s what we’ve done. And I think that, you know, when you look at the potential France-U.K. Combined Joint Expeditionary Force project, which is designed to come to fruition in 2016, that’s certainly not designed to be a solely bilateral arrangement. We would love that to be the framework in which other nations can pluck, hence the need to have a common architecture, hence the need to base it on, you know, NATO thinking.

MR. BERTEAU: Is that harder for ground forces than it is for –

GEN. WALL: No, no, I don’t – I think – and I think we’ve done it. We’ve done it in lots of scenarios, OK? It’s toughest at the top end, at the, you know, top right hand end of the war-fighting spectrum, and it’s, you know, less complicated in lower tempo – not necessarily simpler operations – but lower-tempo, less mobile operations, you know, where you have a bit more time to cope with, you know, their sort of incompatibilities, logistic, ammunition, whatever they might be.

But I think in terms of – second part, what was your second part, which is the – Mali.

MR. BERTEAU: Right.

GEN. WALL: No, I mean, I don’t think the U.K. sees itself getting drawn into Mali on the ground. This is very much a sort of bold French initiative where we have provided – through agreement between Monsieur Hollande and Prime Minister Cameron – an airlift to support the deployment. We’re very fortunate to have a, you know, fleet of C-17s, which we have acquired with your, you know, support too which have been the mainstay of our logistic efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan – which we didn’t have at the onset of the – that campaign. And they’re going to be an invaluable part of our future, and it’s entirely natural that we should – we should sort of share those sorts of things around the European landscape.

MR. BERTEAU: Let me do one final thing, and then I’ll turn to our questions from the audience, here. You mentioned the acquisition changes, and particularly a devolution of acquisition responsibility. It strikes me that that’s actually a big deal, and probably one that we haven’t focused on enough here. What does it mean in terms of how the army organizes? And have you already learned some lessons, if you will, from the on-the-hoof examples that you’ve cited with respect to Afghanistan?

GEN. WALL: Well, yeah, we’ve – I mean, we’ve been very well-served by what we call our urgent operational requirements process, which is something that we developed in the Northern Ireland era to provide us a very rapid response to changes in that sort of campaign.
And it’s been invaluable for filling some very significant capability gaps in Iraq and Afghanistan, particularly in protected mobility surveillance and so on and so forth, a number of areas where, you know, the American Army would be – and Marine Corps would be very familiar.

But that was all done on the centralized system, so our people have been very skilled at writing requirements bottom-up from operational theatres in the case of the equipment I’ve just described. What we’ve got to do is transfer those skills into our deliberate programming, you know, much longer time scales, essentially driven by, in a sense, the cadence of the funding streams.

But it is a very significant change. It requires us to import into the army skills that we have not had up till now. A lot of people have said to me, well, you know, you don’t have the people to do it. No, no, we don’t actually hold on board capacities we don’t need. We’re not that inefficient. But it is going to require us to make a generational change in the way that we employ technical officers, and – you know, people involved in the programmatic and finance G-8 function, to do something much more akin to what you have been doing in the – in the U.S. Army and U.S. – in Army Materiel Command, and so on and so forth.

And I think we’re well set to tell you this: We’ve had to change our operating model, as we call it. It’s a sort of – it’s essentially a business model, but it’s a peacetime operations model. And we are trying to use as many of our sort of battlefield-driven staff structures and command structures, and that sort of ethos that goes with mission command, to apply this in the, you know, business operations, peacetime operations space. And I think it’s going to work reasonably well. Inevitably, there’ll be some teething problems. We’ve got some quite big programs which we’re going to have some big decisions on right at the very beginning of this period. It’s not necessarily a gradual ramp-up. And we’re thoroughly looking forward to it.

MR. BERTEAU: I think this is going to be a fascinating case study, because there haven’t been many examples of that kind of devolution of acquisition responsibility in the last number of decades.

GEN. WALL: No, and I’m very keen that – you know, we – I mean, it’s not – this devolution is not primarily in terms of volumetric money, it’s in – and responsibility and new skill sets. It’s in the acquisition space, but it actually pervades everything we do. And I’m very keen that we don’t just hold the delegation one level down at my level, but we pump it down through the army because I think – we happen to have been through a cycle in the last few years where everything’s got rather centralized, and we could benefit from particularly pumping commodities, rather than cash, down to divisional commanders, and saying, you know – you know, that’s your slice of the action, you know, get on with it, really.

MR. BERTEAU: That’s also a bit unusual, because the typical thing is decentralized down to me, and then stop, right?

GEN. WALL: Yeah, yeah, well I’m simply – I’m declaring my intent to try and pass it more rungs down the ladder. And I hope I shall succeed in that.
MR. BERTEAU: Excellent. All right, let me – let me turn to Steve and Nate now. I think you guys have mics, and a couple of questions here, if you’ll fold them together. And I may reserve the right to transpose an additional comment on one of their questions as well, the moderator’s prerogative.

GEN. WALL: All powerful.

MR. BERTEAU: (Laughs.)

MR. : General, it’s very good to see you again, and welcome to CSIS. There’s a couple of questions on the drawdown, specifically with respect to the British Army, and so I’m going to bundle them into one, I think. The first is; What are the – what are the two or three things you are keen to protect in the drawdown, to make sure that certain aspects or capabilities in the British Army are sacrosanct, and that you can make sure that those capabilities are carried forward? And how successful were you? That’s the first part.

The second part is, are there a couple of lessons you learned in the process of the drawdown that you think could be useful to other nations – including the United States, as we sort of approach a defense downsizing as well – that’d be useful for us to carry forward?

GEN. WALL: Well, I think the first thing really is that we wanted to absolutely make sure that we were not opting out of, you know the most demanding styles of military operations, what you could call, you know, top-end war fighting of a combined arms nature in a joint multinational environment, and that we needed to be able to continue to run an agile development system which we – you know, we didn’t have a few years ago. We’ve grown this very – we’ve only tested in the Afghan context; we haven’t been able to do it on a sort of broader scale, I’m not saying we’ve cracked it – but to sort of take that psyche of being able to play at the top end of the market effectively, so that we can be of value and have a voice in new key alliances and partnerships, particularly the ones I referred to earlier.

Now, have we succeeded in that? Well, we have on paper. (Scattered laughter.) You know, but the next time the call comes we – it’s not just a question of, you know, taking those brigades with their tanks and warriors and Apaches and fast air support and, you know, (modern C4 SR ?) capabilities. We actually, the first thing we have to do is sort of break out of the Afghan envelope and relearn our maneuver skills. And I think it’s fair to say that most people who’ve been in – as engrossed as we all have in top-end counterinsurgency, which has been very, very exact and at the lower tactical level, just as tough a fight as top-end war fighting, as I call it – have had to sacrifice some awareness of maneuver skills over the last 10 years, and we’ve got to regrow those.

So we’ve also got to make sure that our equipment and sustainability systems are well enough resourced and resilient enough to, you know, add the full color and texture to that ambition. So, you know, the jury is out, but we’re going to be working hard at training for it.
I think the thing I was therefore most of all keen to preserve was the opportunity to afford exacting training to do two things: first and foremost, to make sure that our reaction forces are ready for the sort of generic challenges they might face – and here there’s a – there’s a requirement to get away from mission-specific training Afghan-style to something that’s much broader based, that is much more playing into the how people think at the tactical level rather than being able to make assumptions about, you know, operating in a narrower swathe of the spectrum. But no less important to have a vibrant training and demanding training program to ensure the institutional wellbeing of the army such that people who couldn’t go on operations because there might not be any on the (stocks ?) would still find it a very rewarding and appealing career, and we may be able to attract and hang onto talent.

Now, you know, we had lots of debates with our financiers about, you know, which of those you’re really trying to do and, you know, what’s the cost delta between one and the other. Actually, most of our analysis tells us they’re more or less one and the same. You know, you cannot really be a battle group commander in the infantry or the Armoured Corps or the Royal Marines, for that matter, if you haven’t been put through your paces in the training field as a major, as a company commander. And so, because of the way our careers run, there is a requirement to have a sort of two to three year cadence to the training cycles so that everybody gets a chance to learn their job properly and are then better prepared for the next level up. And you know, we have to accept that we will get to the point where you can’t naturally assume that a chap who’s going to command a battalion (on ?) operations in a contingency context will have had a rich experience as a company commander. We’ll very quickly get to the point where that’s not guaranteed. So those two things, very important.

MR. FREIER (?): Dr. Flanagan.

MR. FLANAGAN: General, a couple of questions – actually, several questions on Afghanistan. It was reported in the British media right before Christmas that there was some concern among the British armed forces’ staffs that the pace, the accelerated pace of withdrawal might possibly jeopardize both force protection during that withdrawal and some aspects of the mission. I wondered if you could comment a little bit on that.

And then looking towards post-2014, I wondered if you could comment on a number of – or there are – members of the audience have asked if you could comment on how your government and you within the British army are looking at what – how you define success. What would success be, both in the run-up to 2014 and beyond that, in terms of the requirements of long-term stability and the kind of force which President Obama suggested last week was still a question mark, but the post-2014 force that would train, advise and assist the Afghan forces over the longer term – what kinds of requirements they would have to produce enduring stability.

GEN. WALL: Yeah, sure. I think the first thing is that we feel that we are in a good place. And I say “we,” I’m talking – most of my experience is Regional Command Southwest under U.S. Marine Corps command, so I’m not just talking about the U.K. task force. But we’re in good shape in terms of the ability to accelerate the handover of responsibility for the lead of the security operation in the south to the – to 215 Corps of the Afghan army. And that’s obviously under General Gurganus’s initiative. It involves not just the army but the
enhancements to the police, Afghan national police, local police and so on, and remarkable strides are being made here. And you know, we’re entirely confident that if anything, we ought to be prepared to lean further into that to ensure that the Afghans have full ownership of this, which is what they want and which they are ably demonstrating every day they can exercise fully such that there is a, sort of, an increased period whilst we still have a pretty resilient training and advising presence, which is able to step back and advise them as they do this work between now and the latter part of 2014.

Of course, part of our mind is on disengaging from some of the infrastructure on the ground, handing that either on to the Afghans or taking it out of military use, and there is a logistic requirement to – quite a significant one – to do that sort of work and also start to work out how we’re going to disengage our equipment and get it back to – in – to support our own contingency capability.

So those two things are going on in parallel. They are not in any way mutually exclusive. And – but it is, of course, a neat trick to make sure we will end up in the right place by end of 2014 with the Afghans competently owning not only the conduct of their operations but the enablement of their own operations. In the areas where there is still a strong Afghan dependency on ISAF is in the – you know, critical enabling capabilities: helicopters, medical, some ISR capabilities, to name a few. And you know, increasingly we will be making sure that they – and, you know, here, the huge American investment in the NATO training mission is very important in growing those capabilities in time, including some logistic independence which currently is still a bit immature.

So I don’t think that we are in any way apprehensive about that. The force levels that the U.K. prime minister announced before Christmas are entirely compatible with sort of the right sort of balance of capabilities we’re going to need and the residual resilience we shall need to make sure we can do all of those sort of administrative manoeuvres as well as continue to support the Afghan forces.

In terms of where does this take us in the post-2014 era, well, there are extensive deliberations going on at the political level about what size of force will be appropriate in the post-2014 era, linked very much to the work that’s going on between the United States and the Afghans on that security agreement, bilateral agreement, which will be the, you know, agreement from which the NATO-wide derivative – agreement will be derived. And I think, you know, that’s going to have interesting questions about the handling of detainees, the freedom to conduct counterterrorist type operations and those sorts of things, all to play for in that debate and I wouldn’t like to prejudge how it’s going to play out. U.K., for its part, has already agreed to have a long-term training relationship with the Afghan army in terms of running their officer academy, which is going to be a one-year officer training course run in parallel with the West Point style course that’s happening in another part of the same complex near Kabul, where that’s being sort of driven by the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in concert with our permanent joint headquarters to deliver the first course starting this September, so it will have produced its first Afghan officers before the end of 2014. And that’s an enduring program, which increasingly we will hand over to an Afghan lead, but it’ll be primarily populated by the British army with, you know, quite a lot of help from some of our other international colleagues.
So that’s, you know, a firm peg in the sand which has been agreed between President Karzai and Prime Minister Cameron. There’s likely to be a CT presence, but we don’t know the detail of that. And I think, then, the jury is out on what the Afghan requirement would be for other support to mentoring at the higher tactical level, perhaps the corps level, and other enablers that they may not have managed to grow sufficiently by the sort of change of mission at the end of 2014.

In terms of what does success looks like, I think actually we’re, you know, on the track more than I dared hope we would be a year ago, to something that sees a competent Afghan security force being able to deal with the residual threat posed by the insurgency. But of course, the way all that plays out is going to be very much driven by what happens on the political axis, and you know, that is – there are some very encouraging forms of progress there. But you know, it could go in a number of directions. We’ll have to see. It’s quite clear that the way this matures over time is not just of significance to the Afghans themselves, but to the rest of the region, in particular to Pakistan.

MR. FLANAGAN: We’re getting a little close to the time here, but I think, Nate, you could probably squeeze a couple more, if you can lump them together into one here.

MR. FREIER: There are a couple questions about a point that’s very important in the United States as well, and that’s this idea of general purpose force and special operations force integration. I wonder if you could make a comment or two on how you in the U.K. see the integration of your special forces with the general purpose forces and also with the Royal Marines?

GEN. WALL: Yeah. Well, I think that, you know, we’ve all seen the phenomenon of, you know, that which is being done by special forces today, as the preserve of special forces becomes the sort of thing that increasingly conventional forces will be taking on tomorrow. You know, there’s a sort of progression.

And I guess that progression’s been – in some ways been accelerated by the sort of very intense and demanding array of operations we’ve been doing over the last 10 years, where certainly, if you go back to the beginning of the Iraq conflict and campaign, you know, you didn’t see compounds and buildings and those sorts of things being dealt with with anything like the sophistication that they are nowadays by conventional forces; that tended to be an SF preserve. And I think that we will continue to see that, you know, SF is effectively the pathfinder in terms of capabilities, technology and the integration of sort of sophisticated surveillance and then strike capability and exploitation and so on and so forth.

And I think that the question is, OK, well, where does – where does SF go, then? You know, how does it keep propagating the wave, if you like? And inevitably, there are always new skill sets being required. But I think one thing we have learned is that when our special forces and our conventional forces get separated, we lose quiet a lot of the synergy that, you know, makes the sum greater than the parts. And we actually have very close integration in southern Afghanistan at the moment and it is allowing us to absolutely keep the, you know, insurgent
chain of command up to quite a high level on the back foot, and that’s then creating the freedom for the conventional operation to mature.

So I think that we will – we will want to make sure they stay in step. The extent to which we can do that easily will be a function of where operations take us because there will be a temptation to go separate again. But we’re acutely aware that, you know, U.K. special forces will be dependent for their talent on volunteers from the conventional force and from the regular – and the reserve force. And so that relationship’s – you know, the sort of institutional relationship is going to be very important.

And I think that, you know, if we then say – let’s imagine we have a sort of design freeze at the end of this campaign. And that leaves us in a certain position pending what happens next and we start, you know – that leaves us with a far more sophisticated conventional force that in many ways emulates the sorts of things that special forces were doing 10 years ago, as their preserve. And I think that’s the sort of – that kind of – that’s a constant factor, that graphic. So I’m confident that we’ll end up in a pretty good place. There has been a review of United Kingdom special forces recently to work out how that should be positioned for the future, and we’re very happy with the way that’s played out in terms of the army’s ability to play its role in that, I think.

As far as the Royal Marines is concerned, I mean, they are part of the Royal Navy but they are a combined arms brigade that can – in – when it’s not doing maritime raiding, function in a very similar way to the lighter end of the army brigades. And we see them essentially being very welcome to be part of our force development training and education system, to their taste – which I think is a reasonably keen one.

MR. FLANAGAN: (Chuckles.)

GEN. WALL: But I’m looking at the ex-commandant general down there, so –

MR. FLANAGAN: (Laughs.) We’ll give him his turn at the stage later.

MR. FLANAGAN: General, we’re – one of the ways in which we keep our audiences coming back is we do try to end when we say we’re going to end.

GEN. WALL: Yeah.

MR. FLANAGAN: We’ve gone a little bit over here today.

GEN. WALL: Sorry.

MR. FLANAGAN: I would – I would add – not your fault at all – I would like to thank you for being here. I note that you exhibited some optimism. It looks good on paper.

GEN. WALL: Yeah.
MR. FLANAGAN: The fun part will now begin, because now the implementation occurs. And I think you have not fallen into the trap of believing that there’s a rescue mission on the horizon which will restore the revenue, and so you’re actually going to have to live with the consequences of your decision for some time here. We would love to invite you back, and come back and give us a progress report down the road, and tell us what’s working and what’s not and what needs to change. And with that, I’ll ask the audience to join me in thanking you.

(Applause.)

GEN. WALL: Thank you very much. I’m very grateful for your interest in, kind of, deliberations in our work.

MR. FLANAGAN: We think we have a lot to learn from you –

GEN. WALL: Well, I’m not sure about that.

MR. FLANAGAN: And we’re going to be watching very, very carefully –

GEN. WALL: Thank you very much for your support.

MR. FLANAGAN: And so keep all your successes as best you can.

GEN. WALL: Thank you very much.

MR. FEIER: Thank you, sir. Best wishes to you.

MR. BERTEAU (?): Thank you.

(END)