

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

PRESENT MEETS FUTURE: EVOLVING DEFENSE PARADIGMS

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PARTICIPANTS:

Lunchtime Keynote:

MAJOR GENERAL FHR HOWES OBE
Head of British Defense Staff (USA) and Defense Attaché
British Embassy, Washington

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PROCEEDINGS

MR. SINGER: While our keynote speaker just suggested that I should introduce him by just saying British general. I didn't think that would do justice to what he brings to the table at this event. We couldn't be more delighted than to welcome Major General "Buster" Howes. It's not often that we get such a wonderful fit of both timing to speaker and event.

For this audience, I don't have to speak to how there is no closer ally to the U.S. than Great Britain to the extent that they're even willing to go to bad basketball games with our senior leaders. (Laughter) We just are waiting for what will happen to President Obama on his next visit.

But the timing of a senior leadership visit makes this noteworthy, but also to host Major General Howes for the first time at Brookings. But what I think what's even more noteworthy is the discussion we're soon to enjoy and so appropriate to this gathering of officers in this event, a discussion on lessons learned in leadership, to which General Howes brings an incredible perspective and experience.

He was commissioned in the Royal Marines in 1982. Initially he served as a troop commander in 42 Commando RM, deploying for the first time on operations in Northern Ireland. Subsequent postings and commands include training a recruit troop, mount leader, appointment to the 2nd U.S. Marine Division as a regimental operations officer during the first Gulf War, Commando Training Wing, 42 Commando RM for the second Gulf War, 3 Commando Brigade, a planner in UNPROFOR in Bosnia, a strategist in the Naval Staff Directorate, chief in joint coordination effects for ISAF in Afghanistan, director of naval staff, head of overseas operations in MOD, commandant general Royal Marines, and command of Operation Atalanta, which is the EU counter-piracy operations for the last 15 months, before currently assuming his position as head of British defense staff USA and defense attaché.

It's this long distinguished career and wide range of experiences really does make us all look forward to it and we very much are thankful for you joining and look forward to your remarks.

(Applause)

MAJOR GENERAL HOWES: It's a great pleasure and privilege to be here today. I am conscious of the U.S.-U.K. love-in which has just taken place on our screens. I just was at Andrews Air Force Base seeing the prime minister away this morning with the Union flags everywhere, so I shall try

not to derail this *entemps cordial* by my remarks.

Marine, at least where I come from, is not actually a noun, but an acronym for "Muscles are required, intelligence not essential." (Laughter) So you may not get vast insight from me today, but I will do my best.

Peter, when he invited me to come and give some remarks, he -- I said, well, I'll bring some pictures, PowerPoints. And he said, oh, no. And I said, well, I hope they'll add something. Well, there's a good saying that power corrupts and PowerPoint corrupts absolutely because my PowerPoint done corrupted. (Laughter) So I will -- fortunately, I have sort of another version of this presentation which I've given in the past. So forgive me if what I'm trying to say and the images are a bit incoherent, and I will sort of muddle through and use them where relevant, but you may have to bear with me a little bit.

We've got 40 minutes, I think, and I'll try and leave a good 10 minutes at the end for questions.

We all know what good looks like and this man's image will be better known to you than it is to me and the 20th Maine at Little Round Top at Gettysburg. "At that crisis, I ordered the bayonet. The word was enough." The knightliest of knights, a man who was wounded 6 times and took part in 20 battles; a man who spoke English, Greek, Latin, Spanish, German, French, Italian, Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac fluently.

And we can recognize when things go wrong what bad looks like. This is Baha Mousa, a young 26-year-old receptionist, who, on the 14th of September 2003, was taken into custody by the Queen's Lancashire Regiment in Iraq after the Battle of Danny Boy. Two days later, he was dead in custody having sustained 93 different traumas. There are 230,000 Google sites which appear if you Baha Mousa into a search engine.

Kennedy said of Churchill that he was a man who mobilized the English language and led us into battle. There is more written about leadership than almost any other subject, but it doesn't tend to get one much closer to the essence of it.

I wanted to talk a little bit about leadership in an ethical context, and ethics is a set of moral principles from "ethos," the Greek. Morals -- the study of right and wrong, the coda by which good

and bad is judged in human behavior.

Too often, though, in operations we have to judge between wrong and wrong. We make very, very difficult time-sensitive decisions with inadequate information where you make a judgment between A and B, and somewhere down the pipe maybe just a matter of minutes, sometimes a matter of months, because you chose B in that first binary judgment you end up with a decision between X and Y and you have no choice but to make Y. So the linkage between those decisions, the whole imperative of thinking to the finish and being able to conceptualize the third, fourth, and fifth order implications of what you do are pretty key.

Now, when Peter and I talked about what I might speak about today, I was slightly ambivalent about whether this subject would sit comfortably within the topics, the other topics you've discussed. And I suspect that, you know, understanding or speaking about the implications of British defense policy or European defense policy would have been more in the vein of some of the other narratives.

But I have been struck in the last couple of weeks, months, January/February, and more recently -- and I made no comment whatsoever about the context of it because it is clearly *sub judice*, but as a piece of context; and I don't have this slide -- George Packer, "News from the Wars," *New Yorker*, 13th of March 2012: The massacre in Afghanistan is making a lot of people write history today. It is the sort of instant that immediately symbolizes extreme violence and futility and the inevitable end of a war effort. It's already in the books. After this, it's impossible to imagine any kind of honorable and satisfactory conclusion to the decade of American involvement in Afghanistan. We already know that the Panjwai killings will have a prominent place in accounts of the Afghan war, like My Lai in South Vietnam and Abu Ghraib and Haditha in Iraq. And just as those atrocities stained everyone who had anything to do with those wars, Panjwai will be a blight on every soldier and civilian and policymaker who left any fingerprints on the Afghan war, no matter how good their intentions, no matter how hard they tried to make it come out right.

You could construe those as rather histrionic words and time will tell, journalism being the first rough draft of history and all of that. But the point nevertheless, I think, has a grain of truth in it. In campaign analysis we always try and look for the campaign fulcrum, good or bad. It's a very hard thing to

deduce. You know, obviously, there's a bit of magic dust about it and very often you can only see it retrospectively. And this may or may not be, but it will have, at a time when the narrative, when the public perception is very finely poised, this and other acts like it -- however they take place -- are important.

It's a sort of toxic strategy to task linkage. We talk about the strategic corporal. But good and bad, so often that is an absolutely brilliant thing, the ability of boys and girls to make their own judgments and to do brave, courageous, complex, difficult things with a minimum of direction. But when the train runs off the rails, the obverse applies.

And if you just take imagery on its own, you know, it's quite interesting to think about the images. And this is not about America. I contextualize that very carefully. I start off with a very difficult example from my own nation. There are examples of coalition actors in the last 10, 20, 30, 40 years from every country. We all have this challenge.

And you could say, well, there's nothing you can do about it. The fact is that shit happens and it'll happen. But it seems to me that the strategic impact on campaigns of these sort of occurrences demand the leaders bear down and think and think and think on this issue. Because if you can reduce the instance, however small, by 15 percent, you're having a major bearing on your campaigns.

So very briefly -- and I'm watching the clock and I am going to run out of time -- the why, the way, and the whence. Why is it important? I've probably given you an insight on that. How one might go about breeding leaders, training, educating people, and then where does this sort of intestinal fortitude, the energy, insight, persistence, and stamina come from?

In the past, we've tended to focus in a rather sterile manner when we've covered ethics with men and women quite often at staff colleges, middle seniority individuals, and we persist on teaching them Augustinian theory, *jus ad bellum*, *jus in bello*, when actually they know the difference between right and wrong. I mean, they wouldn't be majors, you know, and commanders and colonels if they didn't. And we don't get beyond that. And for too long in Britain we sort of fixated on a theoretical conversation which really assisted nobody.

There was a great quote by William Johnson: What is a great school for? You are not engaged so much in acquiring knowledge as in making mental efforts under criticism. A certain amount

of knowledge you can with average faculties acquire, but you go to a great school not so much for knowledge as for arts and habits, the habit of attention, for the art of expression, for the art of assuming at a moment's notice a new intellectual position, for the art of entering quickly into another person's thoughts, for the habit of submitting to censure and refutation, for the art of indicating assent and dissent in graduated terms, for the habit of regarding minute points of accuracy, for the art of working out what is possible in a given time, for taste, for discrimination, for mental courage and mental soberness, and above all you go to a great school for self-knowledge.

And when you are working in a complex, shifting, difficult, ambiguous moral environment self-knowledge is quite close to being the key. If you haven't spent the time to think and examine and ruminate to work out who you are and what you stand for, when you're really, really under pressure don't be surprised if your references are blurred. So this tends to be the dialect and it's not a useful one.

So why? Well, uncertainty absolutely continues to characterize what we do. This is a quote from the Second Gulf War, but it still applies: During 2003, when I was with the United States -- wrong, 2003, when I was part of the 2nd MEF, we attacked into Southern Iraq at the start of the Gulf War.

These were the assets, the intelligence assets, which were looking at a piece of ground which was not particularly large, which was as flat as a billiard table.

Three days after we had attacked, we then had to secure a small settlement, Um Kayal, because it controlled the water supply to Basra and they were very worried about cholera and a serious illness, and we had to do it fast. And we were told that it was a sort of -- it was a concrete facility. There were no maps. There were on air photographs of this. So I sent some people in and they drew this map on the wall having spent 36 hours rekeying the location. There were 37,000 people living around this facility. We did a combined arms assault at battalion minus level to break in, in order to seize this facility. Uncertainty still applies.

You all know Krulak's quotation. I'm not going to labor that.

And our conception of war is this because this is a kind of known quantity. You know, war is a very, very difficult thing to depict and we tend to get our imagery from films because it just -- when you're in it, it's just a mess and a muddle and it's an empty battlefield and nothing goes on most of the time. So trying to get the right images, the real images, is almost impossible. But that is actually the

reality now: a complex, congested, cluttered, contested, connected, and constrained environment.

Rupert Smith's "war amongst the people."

The other challenge, this was a recruiting poster when I joined the Royal Marines in -- and this one came out in 1986 -- '85. And the inference was that the Royal Marines have been involved in operations every year, in fact, since the start of the Second World War, and have lost men who have fought and died against the Queen's enemies since that time, except in 1968, when apparently we sat on a beach with a young lady in a bikini with a ridiculous hat. (Laughter)

In 1968, the Royal Marines took a holiday. And when I joined 42 Commando, we then went straight off to Iraq. And my ops officer, John Bailey, said there are two speeds in this unit, boss: flat out and stop, and stop is Christmas Day. So you have that challenge.

This isn't going to run, which is a pity. Have you seen this video before? Okay, this guy is sitting on the top of an elephant and he's sitting there and you're sitting now on the back of the elephant with him. And you're looking at the pampas grass and you have no idea what the context is, and a tiger comes out the grass like a missile. Look it up, Google it. And he comes shooting out of the grass somewhere in the middle of this thing and comes right at him with its mouth open about a yard. And there's a metaphor for the challenges that strike you in complex environments. It's a good one because they blindside you and sometimes have absolutely no preamble.

And if you've got a bamboo cane in your hand, top tip: You need to have thought a little bit about what you're going to do with a bamboo cane before the tiger's coming at you because it's a bit late. So this is the environment. This is the environment. And I've talked a lot around the world and to staff colleges about catalyzing that interest in thinking about these issues.

You know, when you're hanging on by your fingertips it doesn't do to wave your arms around. So if you've got the baton and you're the conductor, you kind of need to have rehearsed a bit. And what I sometimes do -- and I don't know if the slide's here because I'm -- oh, it is here, but the sound isn't, so you're lucky. What I usually do is I walk into the audience and I give this to somebody and attach to Blake's image with God and his pair of dividers and other kinds of (inaudible). I give it to somebody completely randomly because you never know when you're going to be in a leadership role and there you are, it's you. You (inaudible) so you're safe. (Laughter)

And William Blake is the best known when you do this in a British environment (inaudible) a lot of you who say it should be our national anthem. I wouldn't be beheaded for saying that.

And I get them to conduct, which is a rather trivial game, but it makes the point. And it's really, really interesting to see how people will respond to the individual who's suddenly in the leadership role. And I did this in a group of people, there were 700 of them and about 150 of them were Muslims and they sang their hearts out and the guy then took a bow at the end. And recently I did it with about 120 and nobody would sing. So it tells us quite a lot about the internal Greek dynamics as well, the fellowship that's involved. But you're safe.

That's not going to run either. This is about Zack and inside Zack's helmet. And it's about a young man who has this bun of paper inside his helmet, like a Bible, and the notion that you have to think before you're in contact. Every time the Army wants you to know something, they give you a piece of paper and you put it inside your helmet. And his last point is: But I have yet to meet anybody who went in action and in contact takes off their goddamn helmet to find out what they're supposed to do next. So it's sort of -- it's a variation on a theme.

As a leader, when things go wrong, time slows down. And, you know, anger in the voice is kind of the death rattle of reason. And in the few instances where I have been at the point of decision directly as in a tactical environment where people are dying around me, it's a sort of crystallizing thing. And I suspect a lot of you have been in a similar situation where suddenly everybody is looking at you. And the tendency over time, if you're involved in managing things where there is a time dimension to it, is to become risk-adverse.

When I was a young platoon commander, I wasn't a very good map reader. I just wasn't. It's something you learn through experience. And so I used to always put my best map reader to lead the platoon. And so the guys who, like me, weren't as good as they should have been never got the chance to learn because I didn't want to get lost because I knew my company commander would be pissed off with me.

"For the common soldier at least war has to feel the spiritual texture of a ghostly form. There is no clarity. Everything -- the old rules are no longer binding, the old truths no longer true." That's perhaps a more up-to-date one.

So why? You'll be well familiar with this. This happens to be an American example, 1968, William Calley. I put this up because I'm going to put an English -- a British example up in a minute. When Charlie Company went into My Lai in 1968, they had been in Vietnam for three months. They had been launched on an operation where they were expecting to meet the enemy symmetrically, if you like, and he didn't deign to do so. And several of their company were wounded and injured whilst they were patrolling and they couldn't respond. It was a hidden enemy. He never shaped up. You know, it was like clutching smoke. And their inability to apply -- to control their environment built up inside them.

William Calley was 24. He was of below-average intellect. He was short, unpopular, unfit, nervous, excitable, and too gung-ho. He was always trying to impress his superiors, but his company commander, Medina, used to ridicule him in public in front of his troops. The average age of those in his company was 20. Hugh Thompson, who was the helicopter pilot, was the only man in the entire sort of undertaking, who managed to, in the confusion, maintain his moral compass.

Olaf Schmid here on the left was a British bomb disposal expert, who, after his third tour in Afghanistan, was blown up and killed. And the IED threat in Afghanistan, in Iraq, which surely will be a model of things for the future, if the entire NATO forces in Iraq -- wrong, in Afghanistan can be bogged down by men with -- using fertilizer and very simple triggering devices in an urban environment to such spectacular effect, we have to assume that this will be at least part of the war of the future. And this inability of soldiers to control a threat which they can't see and which is incredibly difficult to respond to applies massive psychological pressures on them.

Herrick 10 -- we call each rotation of soldiers in Afghanistan a Herrick, so Herrick 10, this was one -- had an unparalleled IED threat. Across the task force area of operations there is an IED explosion every 16 patrols. And in Sangin, which you will now be well familiar with because the United States Marine Corps did a relief in place with us, one in six patrols will suffer an IED casualty. So you're patrolling between one and nine times a day for six months and you have a one-in-six chance of being blown up by something you can't see and can only really respond to.

So there are some examples. Deepcut was a training establishment in Britain, so it doesn't always happen on operations. Rwanda, Romeo Dallaire's book; Srebrenica, which was a classic example of first decision. You know, Thomas Karremans, a Dutchman, squaring up to Ratko Mladic;

9,000 young men were put to the sword, the largest massacre in Europe since the Second World War. You know, was it just Karremans? No, of course, it wasn't. There's a whole systemic aspect to what transpired.

This was Dachau. I won't go into this example now, but it's a very instructive one. U.S. forces coming across Dachau, having fought their way through Europe, appalled by what they saw summarily executed all the guards, which seems to be actually quite a reasonable judgment and Patton supported it and destroyed all the evidence. But the guards weren't the guards and the blokes who done it had all disappeared. And when they were subsequently rounded up, they were all exonerated because of this judgment.

Let me go back to that one. This is a bit of analysis I did some years ago as to why things went wrong and why discipline breaks down. And it makes no allowance for a sort of mental state, but if you take these ellipses and you take the outer one as the way you would wish your people to be -- in other words, a disciplined, happy, well-led, well-motivated group of people -- and then the center one as being something which has gone badly wrong, either collectively -- and this was through the prism of the First World War and 92 French divisions mutinying in the trenches after the Nivelle Offensive -- and you take the arrows as causal factors, one of the biggest ones is loss of faith in or failure of commander leadership.

Sometimes there were weird things, you know, a specific catalyst or tipping point which can take you from good to terrible in a very short space of time. But some of those you will recognize. Fear is an obvious one. Compromise, locus of control, exhaustion, lack of dialogue with authorities, lack of support to or from family or from nation, unjust cause are things to be considered.

So I want to touch on this business. So what about the leadership bit? Well, back into what you think about and asking some quite difficult questions.

How am I doing for time? Another five?

MR. SINGER: Yeah, sure. Take as long as you need.

MAJOR GENERAL HOWES: Bob Geldof is probably a slightly odd example to quote, but is a man who kind of tells it as it is and stands up for what he believes. What do you stand for? When one asks these questions people sort of get restive and -- particularly a British audience because we

don't -- we're terribly buttoned-up and stiff upper lipped and we don't do emotion in public, and you'll army officers all starting to wriggle in their seats and sort of examine their boots. Aung San Suu Kyi, what will you fight for? And there was a whole -- I remember a huge debate going on during the Bosnian crisis and people were much more prepared to fight than to die. So, you know, what you will die for?

And you can look at this existentially. I mean, very, very few people go to war anticipating that for the Afghan cause or for protecting hearth and home, for protecting the children of America from a 9-11, they will lose a limb or two limbs or four limbs or their lives. And so when you actually look at them in the eye and say what will you die for, they sort of look at you and think, well, that's a pretty strange question.

How many of you have got children? Keep your hands up if you'd die for them. You know that. You haven't even hesitated. You absolutely know that in a visceral -- you don't even have to question it. So if you know on the right-hand side that you'd die for your kids and so would I, why can't you, by a process of careful thought and exploration, understand what other things you'd die for?

I think part of this process of discovery is about having multiple lenses. When you're trying to do complex problem-solving as a leader, you know, we have this notion of tag team. You know, you bring a lot of people in to examine something. And you're back, if you like, full circle to Joshua Chamberlain and why he was such a visionary and brilliant man. And it was because he had that ability to look around and beyond and sideways and could see the third, fourth, fifth, sixth -- probably in Greek or in Sanskrit -- solution to the problem he was examining. And he had the moral authority and the confidence to be a bit alternative.

And one of the criticisms of all education, particularly education in Britain and military education, is we stuff it so full of things that we think are mainstream. You know, when you go to university you read history in Britain. At the age of 19 you'll get 2 lectures a week. And at the end of three years you have to go to pass a moderately rigorous set of exams to get your degree.

At the age of 37, 38, you go to staff college and every single waking hour is scheduled because you can't be trusted to take time off and do your own study. Now, how often do you get to depart from the mainstream of what the military has decided is important for you to learn? Not often.

Okay, we're fully frozen now.

Okay, I'm going to wind up, and this has been a horribly incoherent presentation, I fear.

A couple of things, a couple of very quick points.

To lead in difficult circumstances, you know, the business of being sort of interesting and interested, trust -- trust -- which is the fundament of all this, could be described as an equation, which is credibility plus reliability plus intimacy. And the credibility bit is you can do what you say you'll do, so you're a professional. You are expert in your role. Reliability is you do do what you say you'll do, so you deliver. Intimacy is being accessible, it is being understood, it is engaging, it is being compared to take risk and to look foolish and not to guard your reputation as the most important thing that you have as you get older and more senior and bolder and more like a caricature of a general.

And all this is divided by perceptions of self interest. Perceptions of self interest. And when you engage with people to understand those who are struggling, who may have issues within your midst, so that you can mitigate the risks of individual people doing incredibly damaging things, you have to -- you genuinely have to engage.

Definition of a bore is a man who when you ask him how he is, tells you. How are you?

SPEAKER: Very well.

MAJOR GENERAL HOWES: Very well. I walk around this entire room, I could engage (inaudible) company of men for three years shaking their hands and asking them how they are, and (inaudible) they just say very well, thank you. (Laughter) Your whole life could be (inaudible). You could have met today with absolute disaster (inaudible) and you'd still tell me things are great.

I broke my pelvis three years ago in a ridiculous accident and flat-lined twice. And eventually I came back to work and I caught myself doing exactly the same thing. How are you? I'm absolutely fine. It took me -- by that stage I was walking again because otherwise they would have had to queue. I'd have been in a wheelchair.

But getting beyond that and the burn model, you get behind ritual and cliché, facts and information, opinions and judgment, beliefs and values to emotions and rapport, and at that point you get engagement, and at that point you get behavioral shifts. So if you've thought through what you stand for and how you are, the only chance you then have of really communicating in the way that Chamberlain did is if you get beyond that.

Now, it's complex. There are 18 ranks between me and a private infantryman in the Royal Marines. So you've got to -- you know, it's about personal power, not positional power, so you have to take a badge off. But then he's sort of sitting there looking at you, you look very old for a private soldier. (Laughter) And you sit down and you try and find a really informal environment. And I have to say your senior officers are brilliant at it. It comes from your traditions of citizen soldiery, the Minutemen, the fact that there is a contract. And you call it -- you're very respectful and you listen well, things that military people aren't great at. You're issued with two ears and one mouth and the trick is to use them in that ratio. (Laughter) But, you know, that business of engagement, not dominating a conversation and allowing people to express themselves so you understand is a very complex and extremely sophisticated thing.

I guess the last point I'll make is that if you write something down, you have a 70 percent better chance of doing it. It's part of the sort of neuro-linguistic programming thing. So I would invite all of you as practitioners -- and I don't know whether anything I've said has touched a chord in its rather, I'm afraid, higgledy-piggledy way -- get ahold of a piece of A4 -- I don't know what you call it in America -- a big bit of paper you can fold in your pocket, and write down, find some model which starts to explicitly bound what it is you stand for and how you are, particularly under pressure. What are the things you're bad at? What are the things you're good at? What are the things you want to be better at from a really holistic sort of perspective?

And if you can then put this into, you know, a good -- a vision statement, Martin Luther King said a vision is a target that beckons, and it should be realizable, imaginable. You should be able to pitch it quickly. And you can use that as a contract.

And I used it a lot working in dynamic headquarters. When I was charging around and chasing pirates in the Indian Ocean, I had 27 nations working for me and they did an average tour length of 4 months and there were 137 people. It was really hard to keep track of them. So every so often I'd come bouncing back into the headquarters and say hello, you, this is me. And I would put this thing up and it would explicitly say not what I am, but at least what I aspired to be so that a Spanish officer whose cultural background is completely different to me, who may be very, very deferential and frightened of, you know, a bloke who's 18 ranks above him, goes, okay, this guy's not all that bothered about that.

And, you know, he says, you know, surprise is the pith and marrow of war and a leader is a leader in hope, and, and, and. And you have now explicitly said who you are. And if you lose your temper when you say that actually calmness in the face of adversity is key, he can say, well, hang on a minute, you haven't lived up to your part of the deal. And he's right.

Transmission ends. (Applause)

How are we for time?

MR. SINGER: We've got about 15 minutes for questions. I'm sure we're going to have a lot of them. (Laughter) Many comments because this was a very --

MAJOR GENERAL HOWES: Me, me, me, me, me.

MR. SINGER: Yes. So I'm going to let you direct the Q&A. Just to remind folks to wait for the mike after he calls on you.

MAJOR GENERAL HOWES: Okay.

SPEAKER: I would urge you to add one more slide to the presentation. Right after what would you die for, what would you kill for? There's sort of, in the human race, a common list of things we would kill for, to defend our families or whatnot. But when you go beyond the common list, when you're willing to kill for your party, your Baath Party, your Communist Party, your scripture, your cartoons of your prophet, those define the national security threats. So equally important to what would you die for is what would you kill for because those are going to define the horizons or the frontiers in which you're going to be fighting.

MAJOR GENERAL HOWES: Yeah, ideologies, the ideology that drives people. Have you been to -- this is an aside, but I was in Berlin and I think Tom Cruise made a film of it and the scene where Stauffenberg was executed was actually where he was executed. And there's an amazingly powerful sculpture in that courtyard which wasn't (inaudible), but a bronze figure with his hands -- a very tall bronze figure and his hands were secured with barbed wire. And he -- (inaudible) you can hear me. (Laughter) And there were two steps in front of him, bronze steps. And the small -- the first one is shallow. It's a small step. The next one is bigger. And the metaphor is resistance.

So I completely accept your point, but I know that if I had been born in Belfast when I was born, I'd have joined the IRA because that was a crack. You know, I ended up by joining the Royal

Marines Commandos because I was looking for a challenge, but in Belfast there was no way around it unless you were very clever and I am not.

If I had grown up in Germany in the 1920s, would I have been a Nazi? And if my whole family was on the line not to be -- and I knew a fellow very well whose father was part of the Stauffenberg plot. He was the head of police in Berlin. He was hanged on a meat hook at Plotensee and he had five children and a son and a wife, and they escaped with five minutes to spare in a donkey cart with a bucket of honey. That was it.

So I completely take your point. But as individual actors breaking out of ideologies takes superhuman courage and I think understanding, you know, people act collectively, but also individually. Trying to understand that dynamic is important to the point that I'm making.

Sir?

MR. COBER: Stanley Cober. What makes an order legal or illegal? What would, in an order, incline you to disobey the order as illegal?

MAJOR GENERAL HOWES: Well, I could give you -- that's a very good question. I could give you, you know, the legitimacy proportionality. I mean, there are -- you can go back into Augustinian philosophy which is basically underpins military law. I mean, as a Brit he says, this is a lawful order. And if you go into the -- but that doesn't really help you. Your backs are inside Zack's helmet, aren't you? You know, the moment where you're given an order, you somehow -- can't hear me? Can you hear me now?

At the moment, you know, you're given that order, you know, what do you do? I mean, a lot of it comes back down to the fact that have you thought about this and does it feel right? But not doing it or finding a different way, I mean, is it a question of action or inaction? Probably not because there are lots of options.

You know, if you were sitting on a road and there are people around you being killed by sniper fire and every two seconds another man is shot because you're hiding behind a stone curb which is six inches high, and they're all around you in the buildings, and you have the option of bringing an air strike in on those buildings, you could drop 'Faye' on it, you could drop something really chunky and then you could neutralize the problem, but you know that there are, I don't know, five snipers, but all the

buildings are occupied by, you know, families, what do you do? Is that legal or -- you know, lawful or unlawful?

You will have options. And I don't think -- I mean, you're probably right when it boils down to judgments. I mean, I think in a way it's more interesting to examine it not from the point of view of the order, but more from the judgment because very often people aren't acting with orders. The most difficult thing -- they have, you know, overall intent and the most difficult thing is that, you know, when the undertaking starts, that slide I put up of the helicopter assault, we had an 89-page operations order with very, very detailed synchronization and all the rest of it. It was the largest helicopter assault in Vietnam. And 12 -- 11 minutes into that, a helicopter crashed and 12 men were dead: 4 U.S. Marines, 8 Royal Marines. And the whole thing was then re-cocked in short notice.

I think it was Eisenhower who said that, counter-intuitively, the important thing is not the plan, but the planning and the collective intuition which grows from that undertaking. And then when the thing is running, it's kind of running, so, you know, in the contested, connected, congested, constrained, blah environment, once, you know, you set people off and tell them to go forth and do what it is you're trying to achieve and then they kind of make their judgments in the moment, and particularly in an urban environment, which brings you full circle back to education. Because at the end of the day, it's the individual who judges, not somebody like me, who by sort of fiat and, you know, complex machinery says this is what you should do. And he then looks all the back up the chain and says that's unlawful, I'm not doing it.

Ma'am, yes?

MS. O'DONNELL: I was just wondering if you -- thank you. Clara O'Donnell, visiting fellow at Brookings.

I was just wondering if the challenges that you raised regarding leading troops, if you believe they become more complex when one is trying to lead troops from various countries together. And as part of that answer, I was wondering to what extent do you think that the British and French armed forces might encounter challenges from a cultural level as they try to work increasingly closely together.

MAJOR GENERAL HOWES: She's English. Did you understand that? (Laughter) It was about -- did you get that? Did you get her question? I think I got her question. It was about the extra

level of complexity of coalition forces when the troops who are cooperating have different cultures.

(SPEAKER AWAY FROM THE PODIUM/MICROPHONE)

SPEAKER: English and French.

MAJOR GENERAL HOWES: English and French, thank you for sharpening me up on the specifics. (Laughter)

I'll come back to the specifics. I mean, I think -- let me just -- we're all prisoners of our experience. Bosnia was an interesting experience in that the secretary-general of the United Nations at the time was an Egyptian Copt, Boutros-Ghali, and his special advisor, Yasushi Akashi, was Japanese. So there are two quite interesting layers, both very bright men. So they had a certain cultural lens and then they were looking into a mélange of sort of ethnic, cultural, tribal tensions within Bosnia-Herzegovina, and a whole raft of different nations all trying to come to a conclusion and to find the moral courage to do some difficult things, which were quite a step change from what we had done before that and Europe lacking leadership to sort of grasp the nettle. And the prism that you were trying to see this through was so -- had so many notes in it, so many flaws, that I'm sure that compounded the problem.

To come back to the specifics of what you said, see, that's the challenge, undoubtedly. You know, there's this sort of whole veneer of potential distortion. Is what I'm saying to you what you're hearing? We both come from the same country, but you're a woman and I'm a man and I'm about twice your age and, and, and, and, and. But all things being equal, you're understanding me better than the ladies and gentlemen from America just because we're British, perhaps.

As far as the, you know -- I can quote the prime minister yesterday, who had lunch with -- I happened to be at lunch with your secretary of state in the State Department. And he said it was about 1812, everywhere we went we bumped into 1812, usually humorously-ish. (Laughter) And I was thinking that was actually not that long ago really. It isn't, is it? I mean, it's 3 -- it's not 3 generations if you measure a generation by 10 years, but it's 3 lots of 70-year-old men who burned the White House down. And he was asked about why the British weren't making more of 1812, and the real reason is because we're sort of running around doing the Olympics and we have the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, so those are the two things we're doing this year. And actually we'd rather celebrate the start of a friendship rather than the beginning of a war, so 1815.

But Prime Minister Cameron gave a different reason. He said, well, we're coming up to the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo when we stuffed the French, and we'd much rather celebrate that. (Laughter) So I got slightly higher level of coverage on that.

I mean, a sensible, serious answer, globalization I guess helps. There's a cultural convergence all over. But at the end of the day, it boils down to national interest, doesn't it? You know, if we are cooperating and have coincident, clear interests, then we'll find a way to accommodate and compromise and work well together. And where we don't, we won't.

I'm not sure I've answered your question very well.

MR. SINGER: One last question.

MAJOR GENERAL HOWES: The gentleman right at the back.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

MAJOR GENERAL HOWES: Since I have a microphone.

SPEAKER: Sir, I had a question about seeing the elephant, which I think was a phrase of the American Civil War. You had either seen the elephant or you hadn't. Maybe it's seeing the tiger jumping out at you.

Just from listening to you and as a veteran it sounds like you know what you're talking about. So do you have any advice for policymakers or those of us in the room that maybe don't have the same visceral experience as you, especially making decisions that send people to make life-altering decisions?

MAJOR GENERAL HOWES: I guess I would return to the rather busy diagram I put together when I was at staff college some years ago, that bull's-eye thing. You know, this is a complex, multifactorial issue. And the buttons that you press with people, they're nonlinear. They're not necessarily predictable. And they're not like steel, when you take a piece of steel and you can sort of -- you can stress it to failure in a predictable manner in an engineering context, you know, and, all things being equal, the piece of steel will fail at the same point each time. People aren't like that.

And when policy decisions are made, particularly in the way that people's lives are managed -- and this takes in the sort of holistic bit -- there's a great generosity of spirit amongst the American people in the way that the military is looked after. I had the huge privilege of meeting your

commander in chief yesterday, the President, in the White House. And I stuck my hand out and he looked at me and he said thank you for your service, which I understand is quite a standard salutation for servicemen in address, but I wasn't expecting it from him. So I looked at him back and said, well, thank you for yours. (Laughter) And I don't know whether he thought I was being rude or otherwise. I hope not because it was meant.

So for policymakers I think it's the recognition that when you make judgments, particularly in times of austerity you decide to trim something, you adjust something, you always have to keep a very careful eye on the fact that what you're doing in terms of goodwill support the downstream implication of something which seems actually quite logical and trivial, whether it's in an operational context or whether it's in a supporting the family context, can have very, very uncertain consequences. So you're back to understanding the sophistication of what makes people tick, and it's not always obvious, and you can push people.

And then just doing the analysis, you know, understanding what tour length does, doing the rigorous assessment on the -- taking the trouble on the basis of the very significant amount of experience we have, regrettably, in the last decade and a half to really try to understand what affects what. So that, you know, one can reduce the 1 percent, 0.1 percent, 0.0001 percent chance of people acting in a way that all of us would rather they didn't to something less than that.

MR. SINGER: Well, before I introduced the general he asked me not to oversell him and I think you can see that I definitely did not oversell him. I undersold the remarks. You can see how rapt this audience is. We want to thank you again, so please join me in a round of applause.

(Applause)

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