

INTEGRATED REVIEW COMMENTARY

By Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon GCB, CBE



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Fast jet pilot in the 1960s, a squadron commander in the 1970s, a station commander in the 1980s, before serving as AOC-in-C Support Command during the Gulf War and later AOC-in-C Strike Command. Chief of the Air Staff from 1992 to 1997, advising the HMG on the implementation of No Fly Zones in Iraq and Bosnia and implemented the Front Line First initiative.

The Integrated Review was heralded by Dominic Cummings as the most profound since World War 2; following his departure, this ambitious claim was modified to the most profound since the end of the Cold War. In some ways this is a justified claim, in that with the exception of the 1998 Labour Party Review, it departs from every review conducted by the Conservative party which have been essentially cost cutters, some with fancy titles, but in essence reductions of manpower, equipment and Infrastructure with little reduction in or revision to our national ambitions.

This review sets out a global role for the nation in a world where competing interests abound, and threats vary across an expanded spectrum many of which lie in that grey area of indirect conflict. An emphasis on soft power backed by hard power appears wise, and a recharged Foreign Office should have a vital role to play in more effective coordination of the soft power components. So far so good.

The emphasis too, on space and cyber space and technology is surely right. But where the reader will have grounds to challenge its supplementary conclusions lie in the field of yet further reduction of mass. It is hard to avoid the view that the pursuit of technological solutions within a dangerous world will be accompanied by serious reductions in conventional capability. 'Technology will trump Mass'. Moreover, in that process, capability gaps occur which as the lack of an MPA has shown can take a long time to recover. Much more commentary on this is needed to understand how our ISTAR needs- so essential to the strategy- will be met.

But, back to 'Technology trumps Mass'; no one can deny that the right technology can defeat mass. It is not a given however. Years of Cold war war-gaming on the Central Front showed time and again, that whilst our technology was superior, Soviet mass invariably won through causing reversion to the use of tactical nuclear weapons under Deterrent strategy. So, let us imagine that the cyber and cyber space battle, fought out almost certainly in declining command and control conditions with information flow hugely at risk, and fought to a state close to paralysis on both sides, then where does the advantage lie? It lies with the State which has the conventional force mass; and it is surely the reason that our potential enemies have continued to upgrade their conventional forces both in numbers and capabilities.

'Defence in a Competitive Age' the defence element of the Integrated review does not address these matters and whilst it may be that much attention has been given to this critical factor, there is no evidence that it has. The various reviews are well produced and contain some thoughtful projections although a commentary I read described the style rather aptly as 'buzzword tombola'. We shall perhaps learn more about capability gaps and the analysis that has gone into reduction of our numbers, both personnel and equipment, and we need to because, if technology fails to trump mass, we are in big trouble.