

PUBLICSERVANT

This article, 'General Jackson opens fire for MoD reform' written by Lynda King Taylor, appeared in the September '07 edition of Public Servant – The Publication for Today's Public Service Leaders.

Lynda King Taylor can be contacted on:

Tel: +44 (0)20 7262 1531 Mobile: +44 (0)7775 658067

Fax: +44 (0)20 7706 1551

LKTLondon@aol.com • www.lyndakingtaylor.com

www.publicservant.co.uk

PUBLICSERVANT

ABC THE PUBLICATION FOR TODAY'S PUBLIC SERVICE LEADERS

A question of leadership



Whitehall needs fixing – Colin Talbot
• page 17

Time to reform the MoD – General Sir Mike Jackson
• page 12

NEWS

QUESTIONS UNRESOLVED ON GENDER PAY

- Negotiations resume under shadow of court appeal, says Jan Parkinson...page 4
- Tory tax cut plans 'disaster for the environment'...page 4
- Leeds seeks funds to avert flood disaster...page 5



ANALYSIS page 6

United we stand

Successful bidders for unitary status say it is time to stop arguing and to seize the opportunity for change

ANALYSIS page 8

Braced for cuts

Efficiency savings are reaching their limit – service reductions come next, says LGA chairman Sir Simon Milton

FEATURES page 17

Focus on skills

From gender equality to leadership development, a 13-page special feature on public sector skills

FEATURES page 31

Time for action

The government must pluck up courage for radical action to tackle climate change, says David Janner-Klausner

FEATURES page 43

PPP in the spotlight

Public Service Events' PPP Expo 07 debates the delivery challenges ahead for the PPP/PFI sector

Contact: Alan Fitzgerald

- 020 7090 2562
- marketing@sgam.co.uk
- www.sgam.co.uk

SOCIETE GENERALE
Asset Management

General Jackson opens fire for MoD reform

General Sir Mike Jackson is Britain's most famous soldier of modern times. One-time paratrooper, a leader from the front, fierce in defence of causes across the globe and close to Whitehall, 'Macho Mike' talks to Lynda King Taylor

When General Sir Mike Jackson faced an order from America's four-star general, NATO supreme allied commander Wesley Clark, to block the runways of Pristina airport to Russian troops and aircraft at the end of the Kosova war, Jackson reputedly answered: "I won't start World War III for you."

The best known British general of modern times has something of the grittiness of his military hero, the "Iron Duke" Wellington, about him, and now a year on from his retirement as chief of the general staff, Jackson is not noticeably softening into life on pension patrol.

He will be remembered for his efforts to end ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and latterly as head of the Army, but he served in Northern Ireland, the Balkans and Bosnia, from the jungle to the Arctic, and commanded the Parachute Regiment in the 80s. His resolute and dominant personality has been every bit as evident in more recent skirmishes when Whitehall and Westminster put him to the test.

His criticism of the Ministry of Defence's running of the armed forces stems from a gap in its understanding of military ethos. Loyalty must be built from the base, he says. "Sadly I did not find this fundamental proposition shared by the MoD." He has accused the MoD of fostering a culture of "so-called best practice", for example, "whereby the MoD congratulates itself on achieving an accommodation improvement plan defined by what it calls affordability, but which is far from what's defined by the needs of soldiers and their families".

Has anything happened since accusing government of neglecting soldiers? Have the comments in his Dimpleby lecture at the end of last year about

"hardly impressive" pay for soldiers, and the poor state of accommodation resulted in action?

The most important task of any government with defence budgets, says Sir Mike, is to decide spending priorities. "Nobody wants to pay more tax than they have to and there are always going to be constraints," he says. "The defence budget in broad terms has been flat for a number of years. They will say there has been an increase of 1 per cent over the last spending round, judged against inflation.

"Accommodation is shameful. That's just about money. It is not anything about operational tempo, training or whatever, it's simply a matter of money. Within the defence budget there are some hard decisions to take. I think a modest increase would be right in the new spending review." Improvements are being made, but he admits: "It's a zero sum game. You have to take money from some other programme."

He is keen to see evidence that the MoD is sharpening and speeding up its procurement act and getting better value for money. "Cost overruns on major equipment for example are a matter of fact. Our ability to acquire equipment on time that does what it's meant to do and at roughly the cost originally thought is not good."

Who is to blame? "The MoD puts too much on process and not enough on outcomes. In their defence, there are clear responsibilities over accounting for and spending of public money. Lord Drayson, minister for defence procurement, is trying to make a difference here in publishing for the first time a defence industrial strategy. It is squarely aimed at ensuring the UK's armed forces are provided with the equipment they require, on time, and at best value. We have not done as well as we should."

He believes in the need for the MoD to procure from a sustainable industrial base that retains within the UK those industrial capabilities (including infrastructure, skills, intellectual property and capacity) required, from a national security perspective, to ensure UK's appropriate sovereignty. "Paul Drayson is grappling with it. It's got to be more than just 'we want more' or 'we got enough'. It's a complex area as to whether UK gets good value from some of the equipment and overheads, but we certainly get remarkable good value for money from the soldier."

The MoD is unique. On the one hand, it's a department of state and on the other it's the supreme headquarters of the armed forces. He suggests it makes for uneasy bedfellows. "The structure of the MoD really needs a good looking at," he says. "Over 20-odd years there's been a culture that things are better done on a central basis or a joint-service basis. On some occasions that does make sense, but it's gone too far in my view.

"I do feel the ability of the individual chiefs of staff to run their own service has been eroded. They don't have the money and many people don't know that. The head of the Army is banging on about army quarters not being up to scratch and people say 'why can't he do something about it'. Simple, he doesn't have the money. The money sits in the Defence Estates' pot, responsible for all MoD's properties, and they score themselves on whether they hit their targets for that year – targets being defined by the budget. So it's circular. I am not convinced that the MoD's structures and processes are as well designed as they could be to get best value from the budget."



“

The ability of the individual chiefs of staff to run their own service has been eroded. They don't have the money and many people don't know that

”

At a time when the ministry is tightening restrictions on serving personnel to speak openly to the media, Sir Mike publishes his autobiography *Soldier* on 10 September, an outspoken account of a life lived through war and conflict. “There is nothing in the book that is not derived from events and facts... I'm hopefully an honest and fair person,” he says.

His father was in the Army and the young Jackson was commissioned into the Intelligence Corps at 19 in 1963, specialising in the threat from the Soviet Union. He transferred to the famous red beret Parachute Regiment in 1970 and was serving in Northern Ireland when the regiment was involved in the infamous Bloody Sunday.

After 38 years, British forces are now non-operational in Northern Ireland, and for this and other reasons, he is not alarmed by the “over-commitment” of troops. “The press have used this as a stick to beat the government with. People have forgotten reduced commitments in Northern Ireland. This frees up several thousand soldiers,” he says.

“Coupled with this, the commitment now in the Balkans is small. We are now about 5,500 or thereabouts in Iraq and around 7,000 in Afghanistan. That's about 13,000 deployed out of a deployable trained Army of around 100,000. We are short of some capability, but if you view overall numbers it doesn't look that horrific.”

It depends where you look. Fighter aircraft, for example, are not being asked to do much, but transport aircraft and helicopters are in great demand. In the Army “the hardest working people are not those who necessarily hit the headlines. Cooks, intelligence operators, engineers – we have not got enough of some of those people to sustain current operations with the interval we

currently seek of 24 months between operational tours. That said, it's long duration now and high tempo.”

Starting with Bosnia at the end of 1995, there's been a constant, high level of demand on troops. The MoD makes defence planning assumptions – how much anti-submarine capability, how many infantry battalions, how many attack helicopters. “These are difficult judgements to make within the envelope of the government's spending priorities,” he says. “You have to balance what we have to do today with what may be in the future – and it's an uncertain world. Also, what nature of operations?”

He set in motion the Future Army Structure to address some of the imbalances. “If the Army stood still we'd still be in red coats, brown vests, muskets, fighting in squares like Waterloo – you have to evolve, and change has to be carefully judged.”

In his experience, Afghanistan “is a long haul. If NATO packs up and says it's too difficult, I think the Taliban would over-run their government and we would be back to square one – if not worse – with a safe haven for al-Qaida et al. Strategically that's not where we should be at all.”

Iraq is different. “To withdraw on Monday would be strategic folly,” he says. “Over time one hopes, as the Iraqi security forces become more capable and the politics move on, there will be a time when both the coalition and the Iraqi government will agree that the coalition does not necessarily withdraw in its entirety. They may want us to stay in a training role as we do in many countries.”

The Iraq situation is political. “Northern Ireland, at the beginning and end, was about politics,” he says. “Politics that became violent. What the security forces have done is to have prevented (and this is what win-

ning means in a campaign such as Northern Ireland) constitutional change at the point of a gun against the wishes of the people. That's a hell of a victory.”

Is armed intervention the best way to combat terror and what of our international role? This, he states, is an entirely political question: “It seems to me that UK cannot pull up some emotional drawbridge and bunker down on our little island. We are the fourth largest GNP on the planet. We are a permanent member of the Security Council and by definition Britain has a role to play. It is for the government on every occasion to come to a judgement as to the degree to which UK becomes involved overseas.

“The question is when and how to use that military capability in conjunction with all the other levers.

Politics and diplomacy are vital. You need to get politics right, humanitarian assistance, and get the economy kick-started early. There are many strands in a rope where each is relatively weak but when woven together you get a strength greater than the sum of the parts. You have got to have all the strands there.”

It is the kind of metaphor that a man with 40 years of military campaigns behind him sees more clearly than many leaders.

He is very proud to have been a soldier. He recalls going to Buckingham Palace a couple of years ago for an investiture, alongside Private (as he was then) Johnson Beharry who was being awarded the VC: “As befits a Victoria Cross holder he was the first person to be invested by the Queen, and I followed on. Quite right – a private should go ahead of the general. He represents a large body of those in the Army whose bravery and courage is recognised twice a year. That was a great and moving moment for me.”