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AMONGST the 80th anniversaries being remembered in 2024, there is one at the end of this year which is less well known. On 4th November 1944 Sir John Dill died suddenly from a heart attack. For 18 months he had been Chief of the Imperial General Staff before being sent to Washington by Winston Churchill. The Prime Minister had not been impressed by his most senior army officer, who he nicknamed 'Dilly-Dally', and the move to the US was more a form of exile than acknowledgement of talent. Both President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the head of the US Army, General George C. Marshall, formed an entirely different view. Working tirelessly, initially as Chief of the British Joint Staff Mission and then Senior British Representative on the Combined Chiefs of Staff, they both said following his death that nobody had done more

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to strengthen the wartime relationship between the two countries. He was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery, one of only two senior British Army officers buried there – Orde Wingate being the other – and the only field marshal to lie in this hallowed site of military remembrance.

The Second World War saw the birth of a powerful idea, that between Britain and the United States there exists some form of 'special relationship' binding the two countries together. The strength of this link can vary over time, indeed there have been times when from one side of the Atlantic, at a political level, it is not always clear the degree to which it exists at all. Few doubts

exist, however, when it comes to a common outlook on matters of defence and security. Since the end of the Second World War, where called upon the United States and Britain have stood by one another's side, most obviously through the long Cold War with the security guarantee they both provided to Europe. An unwritten alliance – beyond shared membership of NATO, there is no formal defence agreement between the two countries – the exception was the Vietnam War. Then the Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, although a keen advocate of close Anglo-American relations, found adverse public opinion and hostility from within his own party restricted him from offering ground forces and

anything more than moral support.

Another more obscure 80th anniversary is the [annual Kermit Roosevelt lecture](#), established to promote greater Anglo-American understanding about defence and security and strengthen already close relationships between the two country's most senior military officers. The most recent iteration has just concluded with the latest speaker to visit Britain giving presentations in Edinburgh, Tidworth and London. With the chairman and vice-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff air force and navy officers respectively, General Randy George, the 41st Chief of Staff to the US Army, is the highest ranking active duty officer in the US Army and, in his 36 years of distinguished service, has served and led in every recent overseas military operation.

His clear message was that the world is the most dangerous he

has seen. The adversaries were not named but Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's newly christened 'axis of authoritarian states' would likely be an exact match. For the general, in this "complex" and "volatile" space, in which a local spark could have global impacts, he sees flashing red lights across Europe and a looming Churchillian moment (one of his great heroes) which requires the military organisation he leads to be prepared. As he put it, it is not just a European army or a Pacific army but a global army. The conflict in Ukraine has acted as a reminder that land power is important, both on its own and also in terms of the support it offers the joint effort. Wars still tend not to be short and decisive but long and attritional in which armies that increasingly provide precision long-range fires still also have a habit of ending up fighting in cities and streets. Not much different here from what might be termed as 'Cavoli's Law' and further evidence of a growing urgency in warning of a gathering storm.

Essentially, there were two key strands to the insights General George offered. The first was about lessons and those which, in light of current conflicts, can be observed (he offered the critical

reminder that this is the first stage in learning). He highlighted four, the first of which was that there is no place to hide on the battlefield and with everything a sensor, "what we can see, we can hit" (and so can an opponent). He spoke also of cheap, home produced technology which can inflict damage and destruction just as effectively as expensively manufactured military kit. In response to an existential threat, from 1940 onwards millions of Sten guns were produced cheaply and whilst its reliability was sometimes questioned, it became a staple of infantry and insurgents. The final two emerging lessons were linked, the battlefield is not local and spans the globe, particularly with the expanding integration of the most recent space and cyber domains and wars often taking place in cities and urban areas. This led to a description of the four focus areas he has given to the US Army. In many respects the others all linked to the first of these which was perhaps obvious to those listening and after eight months in post clearly is his priority. This is ensuring everything is in place to ensure the organisation he leads can conduct the most effective warfighting. Connected with this was an emphasis on strengthening the profession including enforcing standards

and discipline. To this end transformation needs to be continuous and iterative, mindful of "cat-and-mouse development and counter-development" and process innovation. In short, is money being spent to best effect? Which connects with the significance of logistics and the importance in delivering combat formations to a complex battleground and able to fight. Throughout there was repeated reference to 'magazine depth' and the ability to provide enough resource to sustain over a long fight. His concern was that this is something industry is not currently able to provide and as he warned, "if we run out of bullets and ammunition, [it] doesn't matter how effective your soldiers are – need to have them at scale".

In addition to the importance of sustainment, the other concluding priorities were the need to be able to fight at scale and be interoperable across team. His themes pointed to a period of rapid transformation for both armies as they respond to the conflict in Ukraine and the lessons that can be observed from a period of rapid change as warfare experiences a potentially seismic technology inspired change. With debates akin in many respects to those that followed the end of Europe's last

major conflict and the enforced move to a nuclear battlefield where survivability was never guaranteed, there is more than a little 'back to the future' reflection to be done.

What was notable were those areas not discussed. For example, there was very limited mention in open discussion to reported recruitment challenges facing both the American and British armies (although it was a focus for the media in the room during the subsequent off-the-record Q&A). Nor did he speak in any detail about what might constitute enough defence spending or strength in personnel to guarantee national defence in the modern contested world. There was no repeat of what was described even in the US as "a rare intervention" by US Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro's January comments when also speaking at RUSI. His questioning of the effect of cuts to the British armed forces – and specifically asking if the British Army in its current form needs to be strengthened – forced some clipped responses from the Prime Minister's spokesperson; Britain is the second largest defence spender in NATO, largest in Europe, American partner of choice, taking a leading role in Steadfast Defender, etc. This followed a leaked document 12 months before when an unnamed American general reportedly said the British military was now "barely tier two" in terms of its capability with anecdotal sources referring to American planning for a maximum brigade level contribution in the event of a major European conflict.

There was no repeat from General George and he began and ended by expressing his confidence in the 'special relationship', without referring to it explicitly. In his career he has always had someone from the British Army by his side on training, exercises and operations and "has been our teammate for a long time". Nonetheless, here lies the concern, which although



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not expressed, exists all the same, over whether enough is being done to maintain the idea. The transatlantic relationship is not just a foundational pillar for Britain's security but it also occupies a key position in the global architecture. Recent leaked reports in Washington show that both France and Germany believe British influence has waned and both countries are now viewed in equal terms. It has been a recurring question for European media analysis post-Brexit but the reality would appear that the British military remains important in American thinking and a dependable partner, just about *primus inter pares*. A leading role in Interflex and before in the often overlooked Orbital, in addition to operational commitments such as Prosperity Guardian in the Red Sea, are just the most recent examples of how it works and, at the military to military level, it is undoubtedly still special and at myriad levels.

Active co-operation exists from long-established examples such as Five Eyes through to the more recent AUKUS which has taken on a life of its own and appears to have considerable future strategic worth including with land capabilities. Add to this such initiatives as Brigadier General Matthew Brown's appointment in 2022 as Deputy Commander 3rd (United Kingdom) Division, which points to a highly mature defence relationship. The size of the British Defence Staff, some 750 military and civilian MOD personnel based in more than 30 states across the US and including 50 British Army exchange officer/ liaison officer posts, demonstrates a significant level of commitment. And, notwithstanding the absence from Vietnam, there are important metrics: the most recent figures up to March 2021 show that of the 7,190 British military personnel who have died in medal earning theatres since the end of the Second World War, nearly 28 per cent were in NATO, UN and coalition operations fought in partnership with the United States.



What is much less clear is the level of political recognition about what is needed to sustain such relationships. To be truly special demands considerable time and investment. And even then, there may be points where national interests do not always march side by side. And this is before the unknown outcome of the November presidential election and what it means for American global engagement and defence posture. President Biden or President Trump, both will have significant implications for how both countries defend not only themselves but also their approach to an expanding

dependency on collective security and formal security guarantees, something which history provides plenty of reason to question. Poland and Finland are two European countries where there seems to be a maximum effort to hope for the best whilst preparing for the worst in the process offering a more than useful state of mind to mirror.

When Dill's statue (pictured above) was unveiled in November 1950, in his comments the then President Harry S. Truman said it would "stand as a memorial not only to a man but to a remarkable

Anglo-American relationship that bore fruit in a great victory". His opening sentence had been a reminder that "the maintenance of a perfect understanding between the people of Great Britain and the United States is of... the greatest importance to the peace of the world". As General George reminded us, this has never been more true than in 2024 but there is always more that can be done, both to deter disruptors and despots and, should this fail, to provide the best possible response on the future battlefield, whatever form it might take, to defeat aggression.