

ESTABLISHED 1947

DIPLOMAT

MAY/JUNE 2020 £10



CORONA DIPLOMACY:

DIPLOMATS TO LEAD GLOBAL
ECONOMIC RECOVERY



PLANS ARE NOTHING, PLANNING IS EVERYTHING...

Former Director General of the Defence Academy of the UK and Director of UDSS Vice Admiral (Ret'd) Duncan Potts CB explains why governments should turn to military expertise in times of national crisis

IN RECENT YEARS, certainly in Europe, one of the predictable responses to an unexpected crisis or identified risk being realised, is to turn to the military for support, especially when the normal means and structures of national life can't cope with it on their own. Whether it is flooding, foot and mouth, the Covid 19 response, border security in Southern and Eastern Europe, maritime migrants in the Mediterranean or counter-terrorism in France, governments invariably turn to the military, sometimes for the solution, sometimes for an initial surge until other capabilities are able to take over. This is not confined to internal crises and perhaps more predictably the military is often the first port of call for humanitarian and disaster relief efforts abroad.

THE MILITARY ARE THE EXCEPTION...

Why is this? On the face of it the answer is simple. Contingency is expensive and holding capabilities for surge is something that most governments understandably do not prioritise in the face of day-to-day demands that they already struggle to meet. Consequently, most national capabilities such as the police, border forces and coast guards are scaled

for routine activity. The military are the exception. Whilst armed forces have ongoing peacetime commitments, their *raison d'être* is contingent response when the normal diplomatic discourse between nations fails. Consequently, they can provide people and capabilities at high readiness. Moreover, most militaries are inherently deployable to places where their skills and capabilities are needed. Importantly, they are also subject to conditions of service and military discipline that means if ordered to respond, they do so without question and quickly. Most civilian organisations have more discretionary conditions of service and are therefore more difficult to mobilise, even if the capacity existed, especially if individuals are resistant to it.



THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IS VERY DIFFERENT. ITS VERY EXISTENCE IS TO LIVE WITH UNCERTAINTY, RESPOND AT PACE AND WITH CLARITY OF THOUGHT AND PURPOSE WHEN CALLED UPON

THE MILITARY EDUCATION FOCUSES ON UNCERTAINTY...

There are other more subtle reasons why militaries are well suited to assist with resilience and response to crisis; their utility is much more profound than mere availability. Most human activity needed for societies to function is based around the status quo – the normal. Most people's working lives have a rhythm and repetition of activity – facing the unknown and unexpected is not an everyday experience. The role of the military is very different. Its very existence is to live with uncertainty, respond at pace and with clarity of thought and purpose when called upon. Success and people's lives depend on being able to do so. This fact has shaped the culture and ethos of militaries and whilst the nature of warfare may change, the fundamental human approach remains constant. These same qualities are needed for wider civic crises. Successful militaries invest heavily in developing the qualities needed, central to which is the notion of leadership. Militaries are often accused of being inflexible and too 'command and control' in their response to be able to work successfully with others in wider society. This is often a lazy assumption. Yes, Command and Control are important, they bring process and structure to complex, often heavily nuanced and wicked problems, but it does not have to be an autocratic method devoid of challenge, innovation and initiative that some assume. Successful military leaders use a notion called Mission Command. This sets a framework for *what* needs to be achieved, they synchronise activity with others, but leave discretion as to *how* tasks are to be achieved to those charged with delivering them.

PLANS ARE NOTHING, PLANNING IS EVERYTHING...

The importance of thinking strategically and planning go hand-in-hand with crisis management leadership. Ascribed to General Eisenhower, the military adage that *'Plans are nothing, planning is everything'* may appear counter-intuitive at first read, but it hides a hidden truth. Plans in crisis are about shaping the future state, but by definition are based on assumptions and incomplete information. Consequently, the need for flexibility and adaptability is key. What is important is the process of planning and the method and thought that goes into it. Most Western militaries use a similar method that meets these requirements. Whilst not being formulaic, it needs both evidence, analysis

and judgment in equal measure. Critically, it needs to be reflective to ensure that as an assumption changes or another fact appears there needs to be a process of constantly testing and where necessary adjusting plans to reflect this. Consequently, another common military expression is that *'a plan is only a basis for change'* or *'no plan survives contact with the enemy.'* This philosophy has served successful commanders well through history and translates to wider resilience and crisis. This planning skill is much more than a mental algorithm or set of steps that somehow lead to a singular answer. It needs to be exercised regularly if a leader's intuition is to be developed as a way of thinking critically and evidentially, but with the confidence to derive conclusions and decisions to act at the pace crises often emerge. All too often institutional decision making can lag behind a crisis, rather than getting ahead of and shaping the crisis. This invariably leads to reactive event-by-event management without ever getting to the point where you achieve what you seek to resolve.

MAKING TOUGH DECISIONS IN ADVERSITY...

Finally, there is both art and science behind when and when not to make decisions and initiate action. The military culture is predominantly action-centric, which can be a blessing and a curse. However, both military culture and practice is about making tough decisions in adversity, often under both extreme time and moral pressure; there are few professions where risk to life is an everyday factor. This develops the importance and understanding of risk. This is not simply the blanket risk avoidance that one sees often in wider society, but the balancing of risk against benefit and the self-confidence to act and take responsibility for the consequences.

In sum, the benefits of using the military and military thinking to contribute to both resilience and crises is much more than a rapidly deployable body of men and women. Crisis and complexity are the lifeblood of military leaders and this culture and ethos has much to offer to wider society in helping to face some of the challenges that societies face. Militaries can inject energy, rigour and make things happen.

Universal Defence and Security Solutions Ltd (UDSS) was founded by General Sir Richard Barrons and Peter Hewitt to provide policy, strategy and operational solutions for governments, businesses and commercial organisations, on a global basis. UDSS has the largest and broadest membership of former British Armed Forces personnel, regular and reserve from SNCO to 4 Star, as well as former MoD Civil Servants. This enables UDSS to provide the very best expertise in the major defence and security challenges of today, including: leading in contemporary military 'hard power' capability; 'hybrid' or 'political' confrontation; information operations and cyber warfare; peace support; wider security; constabulary; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. www.universal-defence.com