

# Certainty, uncertainty and agility or: “How to be successful in the next war!”



Maj Gen Dr A R D Sharpe CBE PhD(Cantab)

# Agenda

- “Dealing with uncertainty”.
- “How to avoid re-fighting the last war”.

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- “How to avoid re-fighting the last war”.
- Dodgy Assumptions:
  - In war, as in life, it is possible to achieve ‘certainties’.
  - We know what the next war is going to be.

# Agenda

- “Dealing with uncertainty”.
- “How to avoid re-fighting the last war”.
- Slightly less dodgy assumptions:
  - In war, as in life, it is wise to accept that you will always be dealing with uncertainty, and to set your minds and capabilities to cope accordingly.
  - Do our best to guess what the next war is going to be, but accept that we will inevitably be wrong.

# Agenda

- “Dealing with uncertainty”.
- “How to avoid re-fighting the last war”.
- Even sounder conclusions:
  - Study our professional landscape in depth and in breadth (past, present and expected future).
  - Understand what Clausewitz meant by ‘a nature and a character of war’.

# Agenda

- “Dealing with uncertainty”.
- “How to avoid re-fighting the last war”.
- In other words:
  - Make sure that everyone is trained for, and comfortable with, chaos.
  - Do what you can to guess the un-guessable.

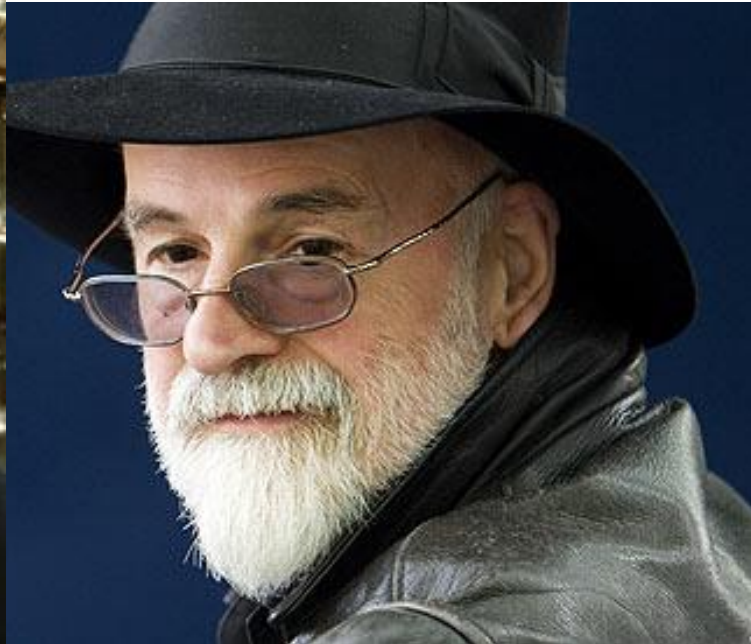
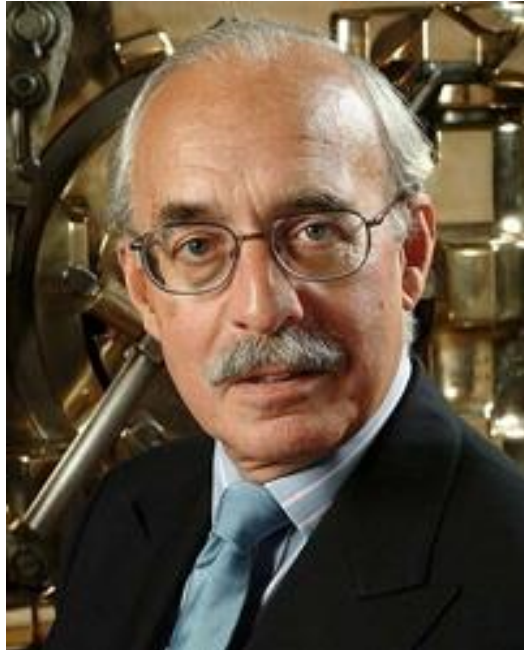
Easy!



# Story Telling



*Homo narrans*  
and the power of *narrativium*





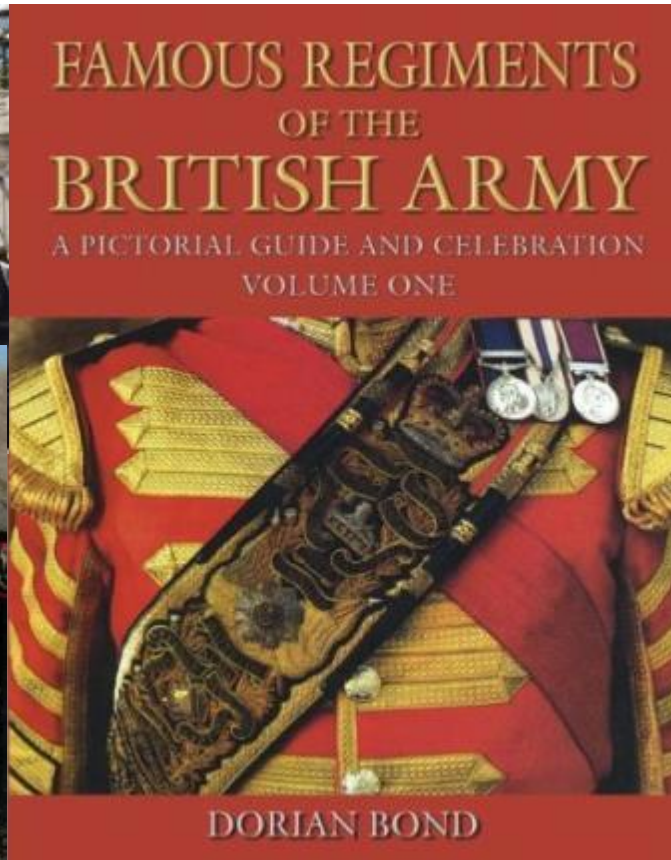




Military history – fact or narrativium?



# Tribal Lore



A question of interpretation:

**Lost Property**  
**Objets Trouvés**



The Foundation For Looking Forwards

# The Formulas for predicting the future:

The flow of events cannot be calculated with an equation – even with an equation concerning things that flow!

$$\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} = -\nabla \cdot (\rho \mathbf{u})$$

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$$\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} = -\nabla \cdot (\rho \mathbf{u})$$

Central limit theorem, regression towards the mean, the Pareto Principle, the law of averages, etc, etc, blah, blah, do not always outweigh Murphy's and Sods' Laws.





# The Formulas for predicting the future:

But both have value, so how do we use what we think we can have a pretty good guess at (all things being equal), and weigh it off against luck and chance, so as to be as ready as possible for both the predictable and the unpredictable?



# The Formulas for predicting the future:

Understand the difference between the **Nature** of war and the **Character** of warfare.



# The Enduring Nature Of The Soldier's Lot

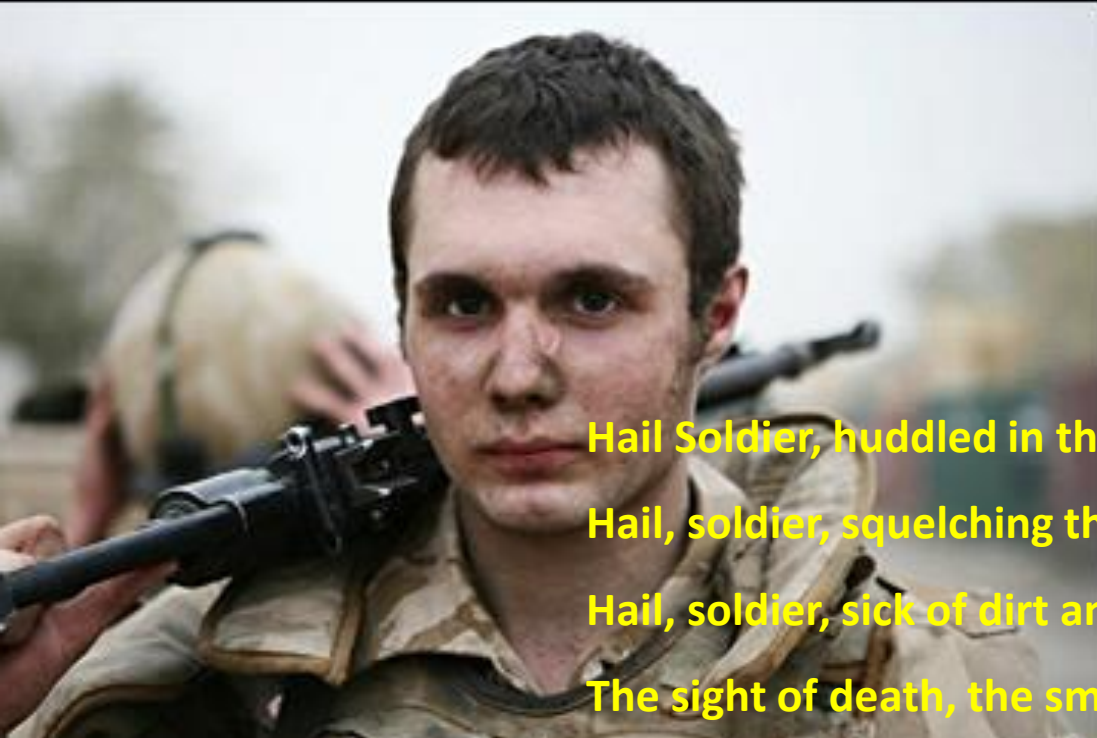




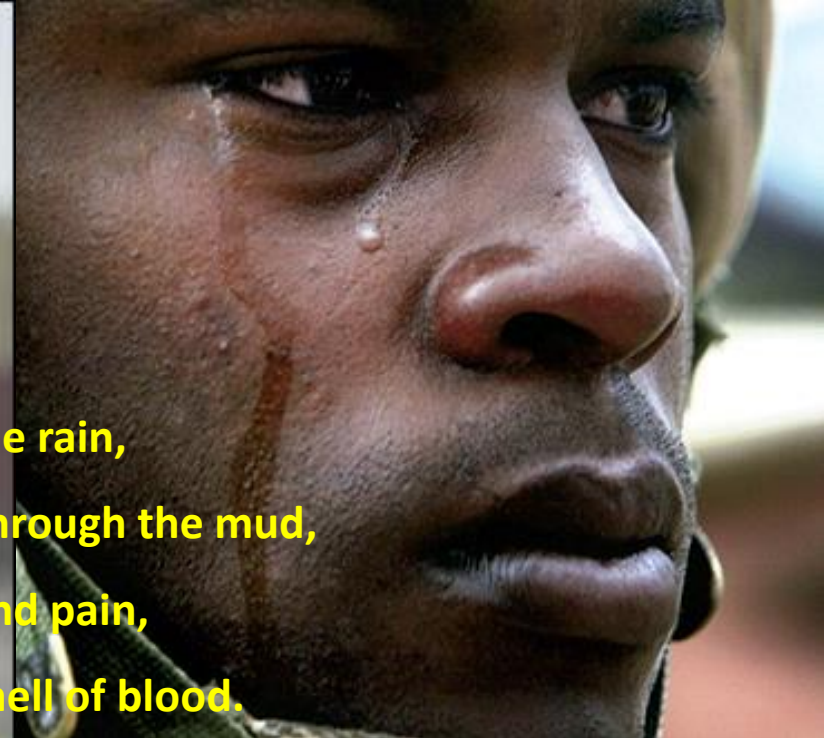
# TIMELESS







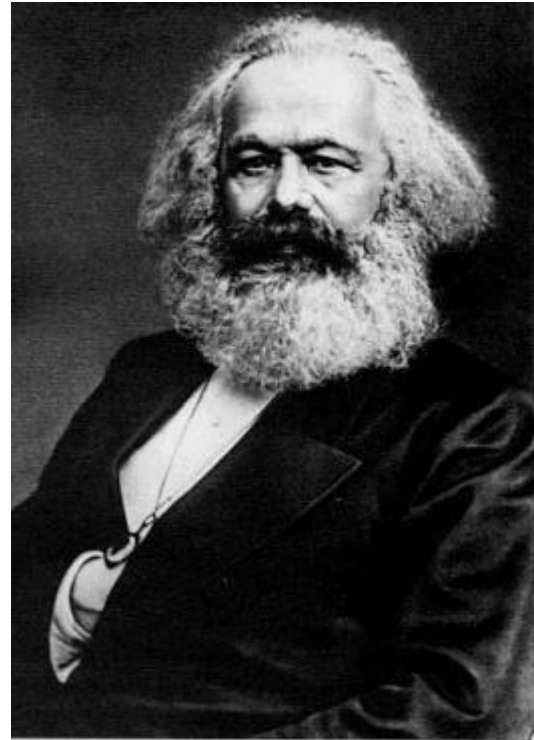
Hail Soldier, huddled in the rain,  
Hail, soldier, squelching through the mud,  
Hail, soldier, sick of dirt and pain,  
The sight of death, the smell of blood.



New men, new weapons, bear the brunt;  
New slogans gild the ancient game:  
The infantry are still in front,  
And mud and dust are much the same... .

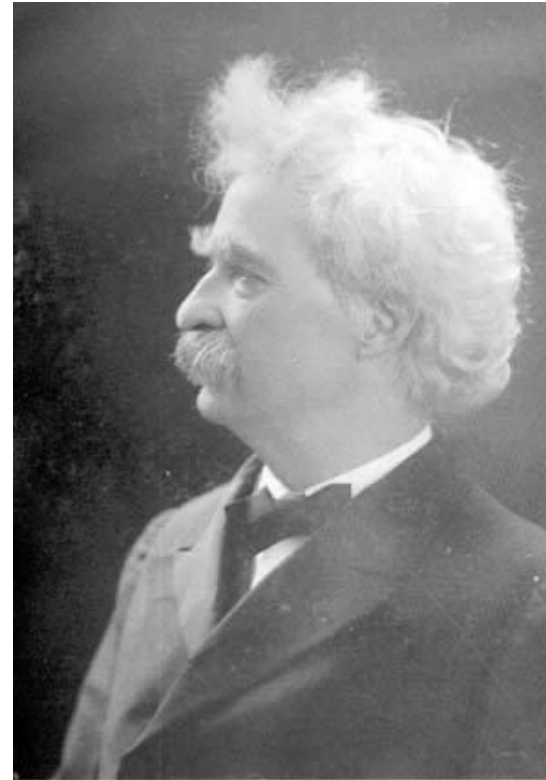


“History repeats itself”



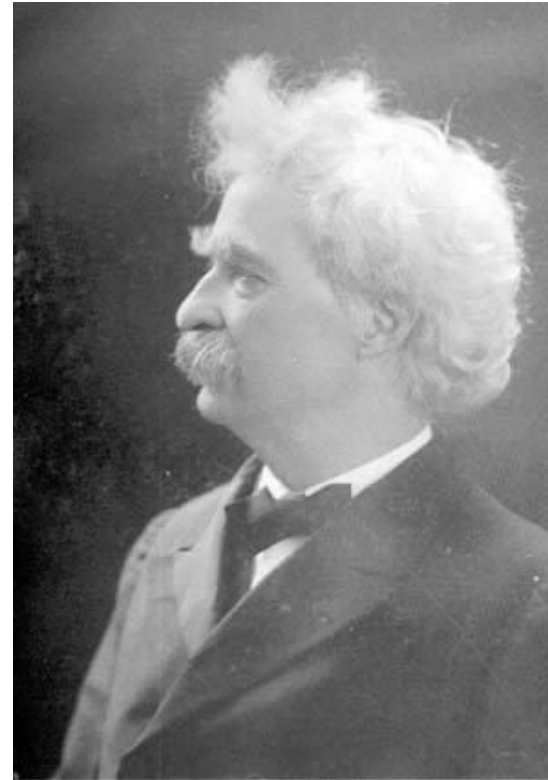
Karl Marx

“History does not repeat itself,  
.....”



Mark Twain

“History does not repeat itself,  
but it sure does rhyme.....”



Mark Twain



Looking for repeats, not rhymes...



# Looking for repeats, not rhymes...

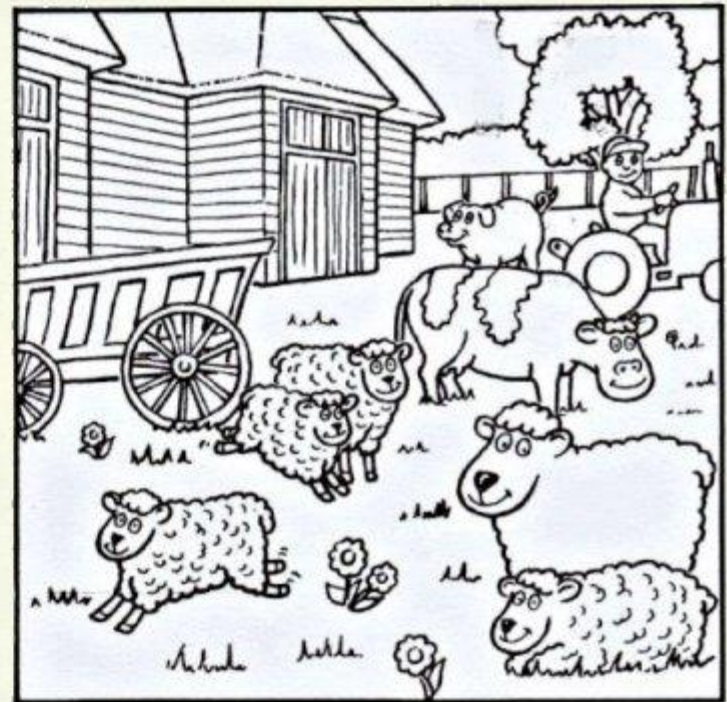
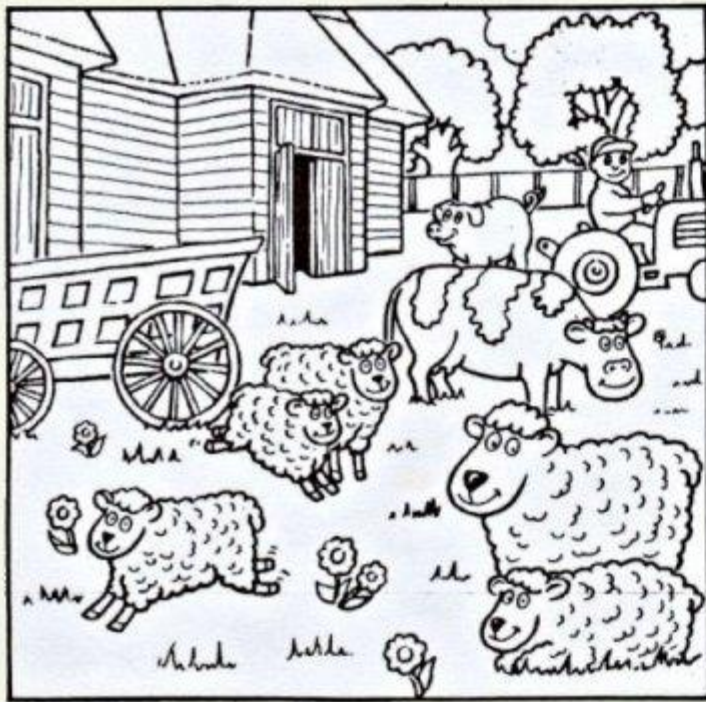


How can you work out what's different until  
you have worked out what's the same...?

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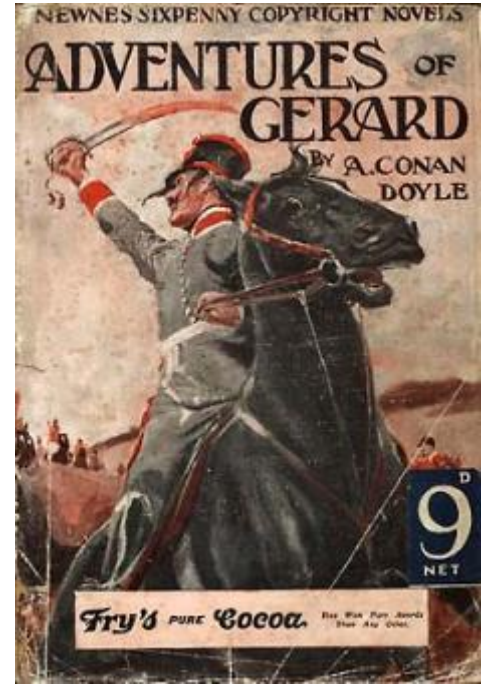
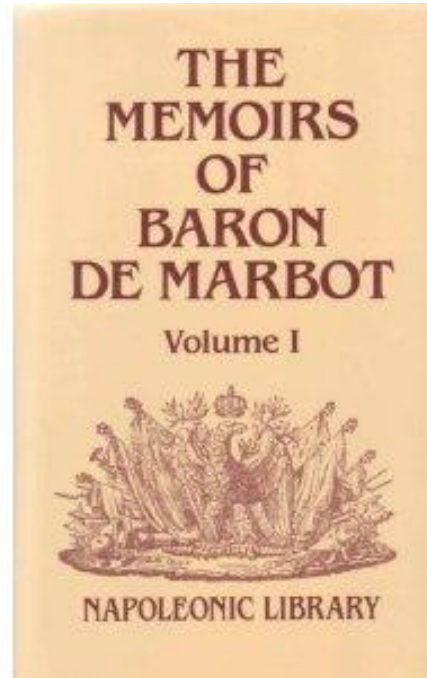
The Afghan Snake....

How can you work out what's different until  
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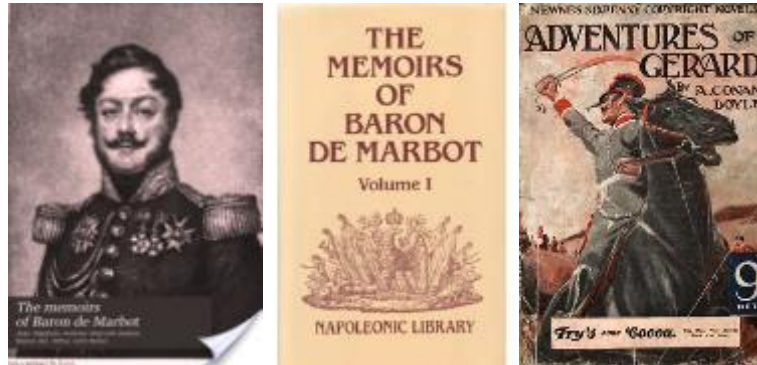
The Contubernium....

# Plus ça change...





# Plus c'est la même chose...



“Up to this time our fighting in Europe had always been done between one army and another. It was only here in Spain that we learned how terrible a thing it is to fight against a people. On the one hand there is no glory, for what glory could be gained by defeating this rabble of elderly shopkeepers, ignorant peasants, fanatical priests, excited women, and all the other creatures who made up the garrison? On the other hand there were extreme discomfort and danger, for these people would give you no rest, would observe no rules of war, and were desperately earnest in their desire by hook or by crook to do you an injury.”

# Plus c'est la même chose...

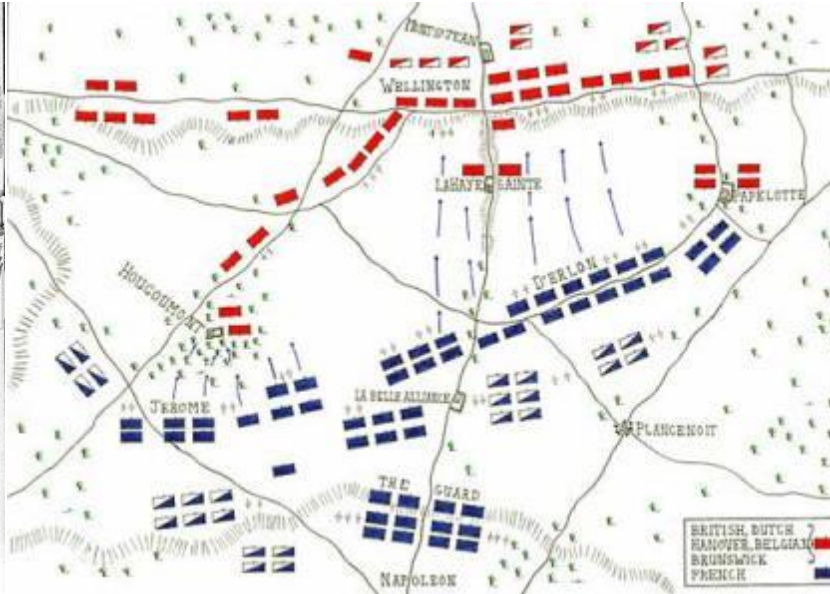


“Up to this time our teaching had been about Conventional War in Europe and had always been done between one army and another. It was only here in Afghanistan that we learned how terrible a thing it is to fight against a people. On the one hand there is no glory, for what glory could be gained by defeating this rabble of elderly shopkeepers, ignorant poppy farmers, fanatical Imams, excited women, and all the other creatures who made up the AOR? On the other hand there were extreme discomfort and danger, for these people would give you no rest, would observe no rules of war, and were desperately earnest in their desire by hook or by crook to do you an injury.”

# **‘Hybrid Warfare’ ‘Asymmetric Warfare’**



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**‘Hybrid Warfare’**

**A lesson in loose thinking**

- So what's 'Hybrid Warfare'  
(or is it 'hybrid warfare' ?), and is it new?

# A Doctrinal Epiphany?

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For Farington, *High Strategic Geography: NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and Superpower Rivalry* (1989). ISBN 0-415-03280-0





# A Doctrinal Epiphany?





# ‘AMONG THE PEOPLE’



# A Doctrinal Epiphany?





# A Doctrinal Epiphany?

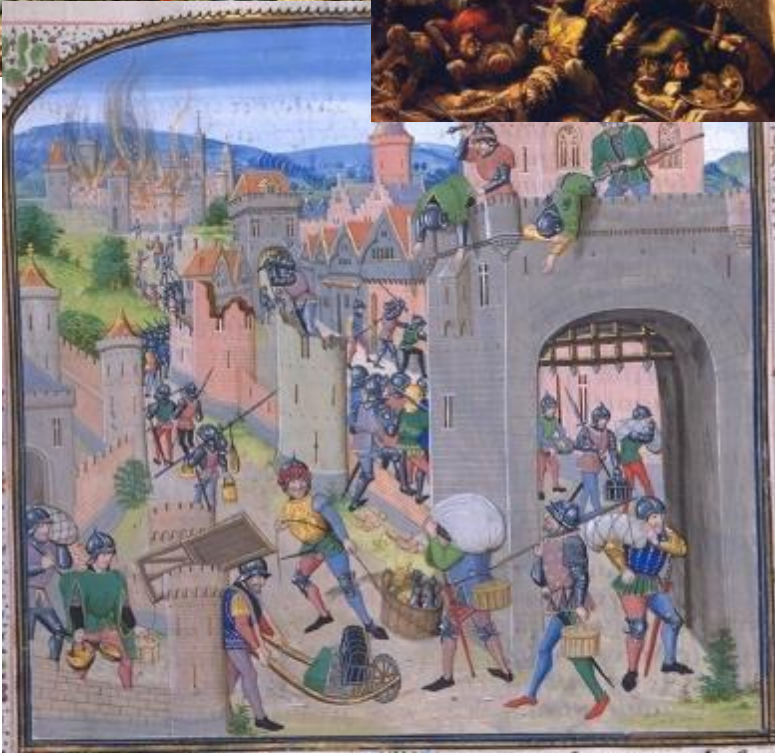




# A Doctrinal Epiphany?



# A Doctrinal Epiphany?



Comment six mille com-  
paignons partirent de la  
ville de gaud durant le  
carmonches autour de la  
ville. Car le seigneur et  
le seigneur de baynau et le



# A Doctrinal Epiphany?





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# A Doctrinal Epiphany?

- Train for heavy war – the ‘hardest thing to do’ – and everything else will be easy to step down to (a procurement mantra).





# A Doctrinal Epiphany?



- Train for heavy war – the ‘hardest thing to do’ – and everything else will be easy to step down to (a procurement mantra).
- COIN Hubris (rhymes not repeats).



# A Doctrinal Epiphany?



- Train for heavy war – the ‘hardest thing to do’ – and everything else will be easy to step down to (a procurement mantra).
- COIN Hubris.
- Cold War warfare – the war that never was was never a norm for war



# A Doctrinal Epiphany?

Not so much a new kind of war as a realisation that what we had convinced ourselves was ‘normal’ ‘conventional’ war never existed.

But

By sticking a label on it and calling it ‘Hybrid’ we are fooling ourselves that we have learnt something new, instead of simply realised an enduring truth.







More than anything else, and no matter  
what changes, war is about People





# So What Is New?



# Uncertain Realities



Pieces of Paper.....Crystal Balls.....and Events, Dear Boy

“Prediction is difficult, especially if it’s about the future...”

Nils Bohr, Nobel Laureate in Physics.

“It’s tough to make predictions, especially about the future...”

Yogi Berra, Baseball coach.

# Looking Ahead



# Looking Ahead

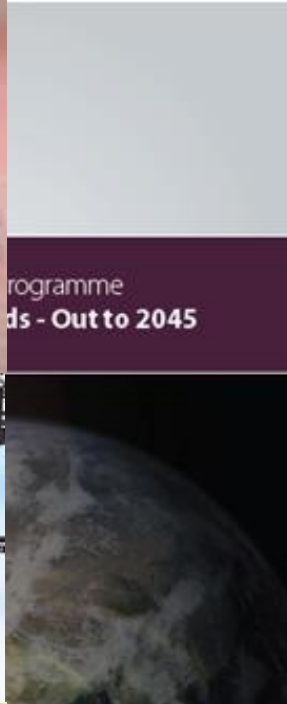


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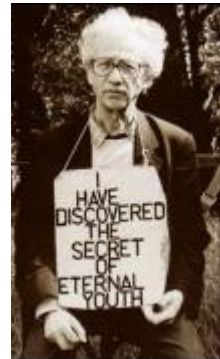


# Looking Ahead

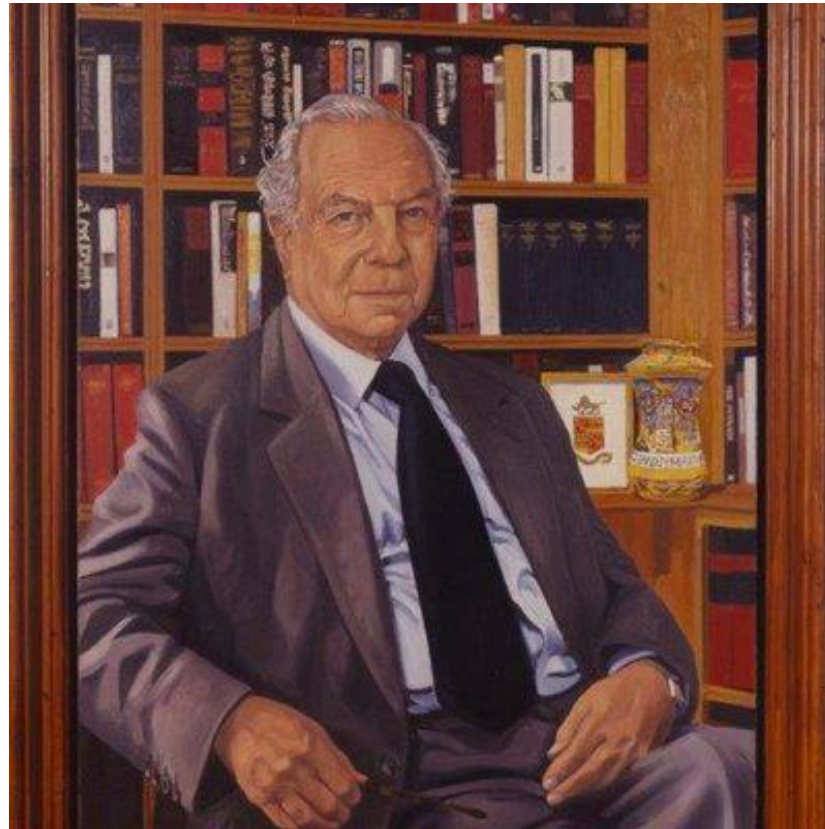


Part 1 **Thematic**

	Demography.....
	Gender.....
	Urbanisation.....
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	The Environment.....
	Health.....
	Transport.....
	Information.....
	Education.....
	Automation and work.....
	Corruption and money.....



# The Michael Howard View



Because we are always going to get it wrong what we need to try and do is be 'as least wrong as possible' while preparing to adapt as soon as we realise how wrong we are!

# So What?

# So What?

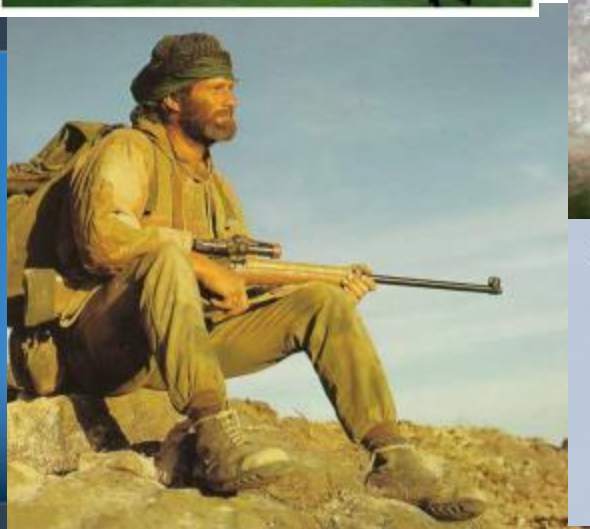
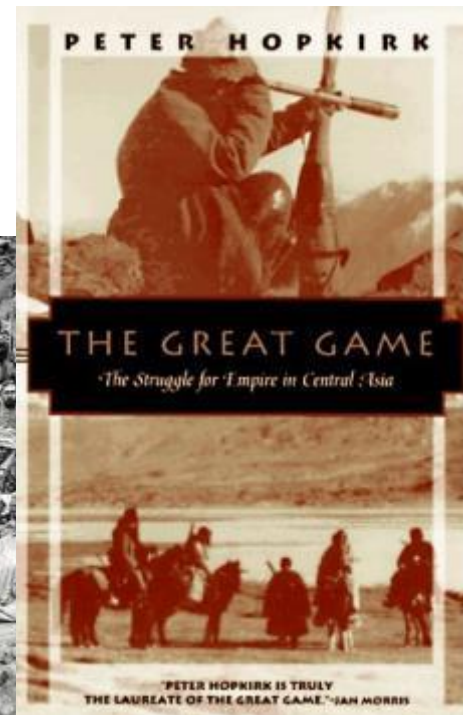
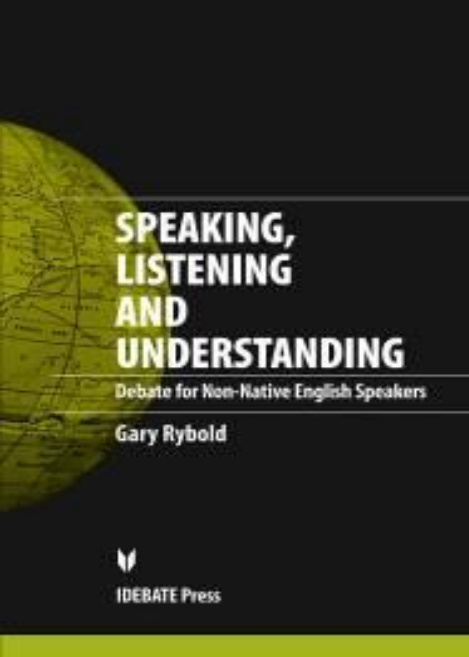
- Continuous modulated engagement
- Whole force approach
- Multinationality is normal
- Genuine flexibility and adaptability



# So What?

- Continuous modulated engagement

# Engagement



History  
Geography  
Language  
Culture  
Open sources  
Networks  
Information  
Intelligence

Influence, Participate, Network, Empathise

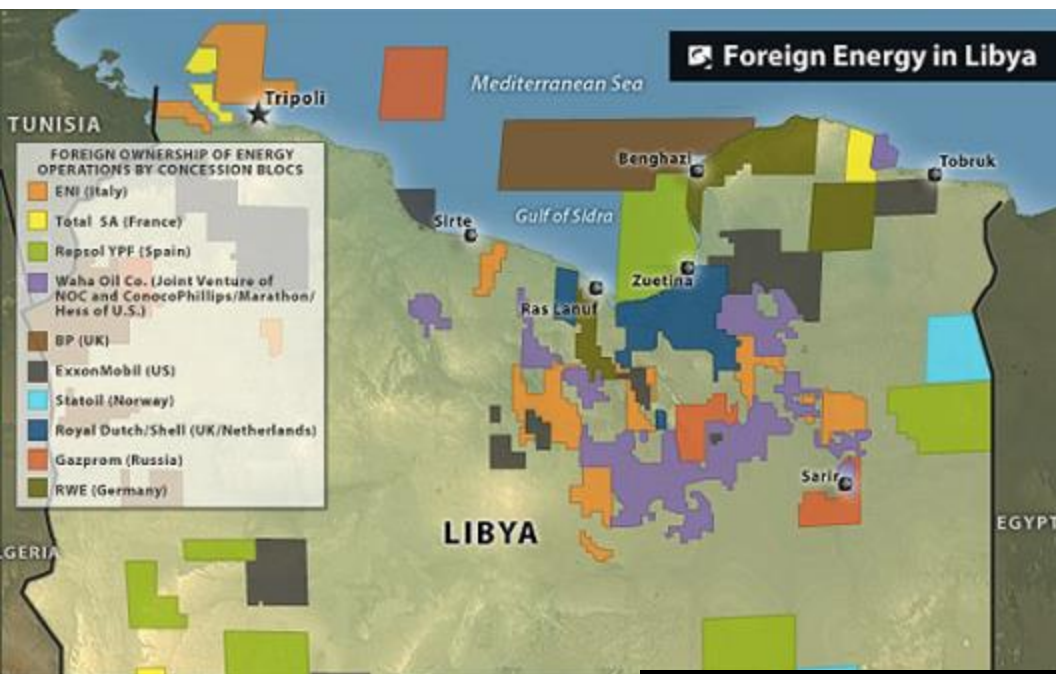
# So What?

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# So What?

- Multinationality is normal

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- Multinationality is normal



# So What?

- Genuine flexibility and adaptability



# So What?

- Genuine flexibility and adaptability
- Structures and Organisation
- Equipment development and procurement
- Above all else, MINDSET



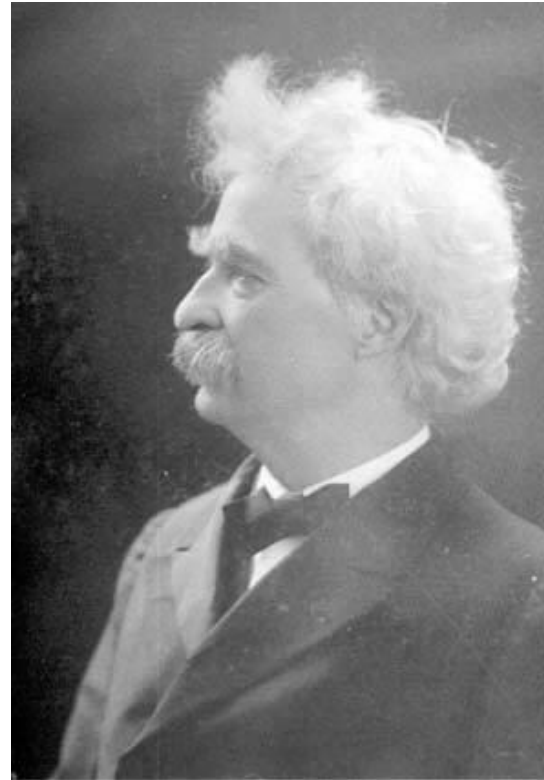
# So What?

- Genuine flexibility and adaptability
- Oh yes! And understand the difference between 'flexibility' and 'adaptability'..... and 'agility':



# **SUMMARY**

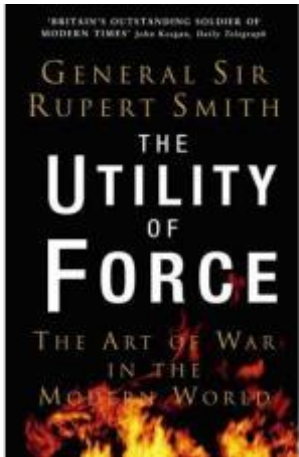
“History does not repeat itself,  
but it sure does rhyme.....”



So it's rarely new, but it's rarely the same:



So it's rarely new, but it's rarely the same:



The new enemy for the new century. An army of the people, hard to tell apart from non-combatants, fighting a new sort of war.



So it's rarely new, but it's rarely the same:



The new enemy for the new century. An army of the people, hard to tell apart from non-combatants, fighting a new sort of war.

Viscount Haldane in Feb 1907



- Any look into the future is helped as much by an understanding of what *will not* change as by an insight into what *may*.
- History helps us to understand what won't change...
- ...but templates rarely fit in real life.
- History catalogues what has worked and what has failed...
- ...so use it as a reference book (but not as an instruction manual).
- 'Doctrine and Concepts' and detailed analysis of trends and statistics should be aids to thinking, not substitutes for it.
- Beware of labels.





Understand the difference between the **Nature** of conflict and the **Character** of conflict...



Understand the difference between the **Nature** of conflict and the **Character** of conflict...



.....and be ready to cope with both.

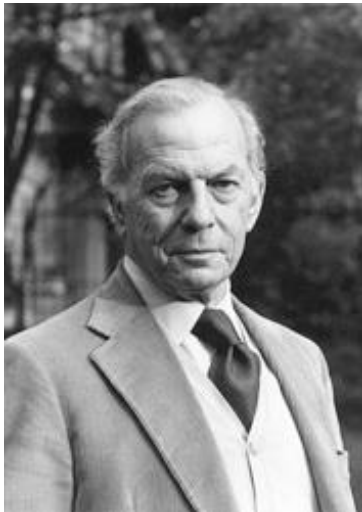
“You cannot consider ‘whither’ warfare unless you have first considered ‘whence’ ”.



General Sir Mike Jackson

## BUT.....

- “For history to be relevant it must be studied in breadth and in depth.”
- “The study of history is not to make people good for the next time, it is to make them wiser for ever.”
- **“If you try to predict the future, know that you will be wrong. The trick is to be as least wrong as possible; and be ready to change when you see how wrong you are!”**



Sir Michael Howard





# Questions

