

Lt Col Nick Kitson

Courageous Restraint

I'm not sure how politically correct in military circles the term 'courageous restraint' is any more, but it certainly was one that was out there, and I think it was pretty much coined when, when we were there. And it probably does sound sort of slightly self-righteous and self-satisfied. But anyway whatever the words are, and I think it's a very important concept, which essentially, you know, I've already touched on some of the damage that's caused by approaching these problems in a purely military way as, as we are trained in our conventional lives. You're a military force, you're advancing, you're attacking an enemy. All the, all the sort of section and platoon battle drills as we call them.

Reaction to effective enemy fire, locating the enemy, winning the fire fight, suppressing the enemy, you know, with all these wonderful things that we have at our disposal, artillery, fast jets, Apache. If you take, you know, if you take that approach in, you know, in what is described as a war amongst the people...

It might be, it might be alright in terms of addressing the enemy threat that you face but it's not much good in terms of local infrastructure, let alone collateral damage and civilian casualties and all that sort of stuff. So what it effectively meant was that we had to, we had to put aside a lot of that basic standard military training and say you may be under fire from an enemy but you may not be in a position to win the fire fight in that conventional sense. And you're certainly not going to start bringing in high explosive artillery into a, into a sort of residential area because there's a gunman shooting at you from a roof top somewhere. And so what that meant was that you know our Riflemen had to have the courage, as it were, to go forward and, and accept the fact that they, they can be a target at any one moment but they may not be able, or they probably wouldn't be able to respond with all the military hardware that they had at their disposal, even in terms of their own rifle if there was any risk at all of collateral damage. So it's quite tricky. I mean to be fair it's nothing, it's nothing new and I think we certainly experienced that sort of thing in Ireland and we certainly didn't have artillery in Ireland.

But I think we, I don't know what it was, whether we'd sort of got off on a slightly different step thinking this was a war and the Taliban and, and, you know, to be fair to people, to, to the, to the earlier phases of our particular part of the campaign it was a question of formed hordes of Taliban, mm, trying to overrun the base in a very conventional style. And it was needs must to respond in that way to stop, stop them coming in and overwhelming you. And that wasn't the sort of threat that we faced in our time. So perhaps in that sense it was much easier. To exercise this sort of wonderful, wonderful restraint, but it was certainly what we needed to do.

And then in a sort of slightly more subtle vein just patrolling around and particularly with the suicide bomber threat in mind you also had to have the courage to allow people to come near to you and every single person you come across could potentially be a suicide bomber. And this is the, you know, dreadful and tragic challenge of that sort of method of operation that we, you know, sadly see in increasing amounts across the world.

It's very difficult to regulate against it. And, the chaps bearing in mind the sort of hearts and minds bit and winning the confidence of the locals and actually engaging with them and convincing them that we're here for their own good, you've got to patrol around and not keep everyone at arms length. I mean there are, some of the training does have, you know, drills practiced whereby, you know, a patrol would arms up, fire mini flares and all sorts of distraction, all sorts of deterrents to get people keep, keeping away, keeping away from you.

Just in case one of them might be a suicide bomber. But, you know, it's pretty obvious that you can't engage with people that way. So, you do require the courage to allow, you know, allow the people to mingle around you, the motorbike to sort of whiz past and you. And that was the significance of checkpoints around the bazaar and things like that. You just needed to play a pretty cunning game to make sure you'd done all you possibly could.