ANDREW MARR:
Now then, combating the so-called Islamic State (or whatever we call it) is the “battle of our generation”, the Prime Minister says, but are the UK and its allies doing enough to defeat IS, Isil or ISIS or whatever? Not according to the former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Richards. He believes the so-called caliphate needs to be dealt with quickly, but that it will take a much more comprehensive military strategy than we have now. And he is with me now. Good morning to you, Lord Richards. Thank you for coming in.

LORD RICHARDS:
Good morning, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:
Can I start off by asking about these four RAF pilots who were involved in bombing US led bombing raids on Syria? A lot of MPs are outraged by this because there was a clear parliamentary vote against military action in Syria. Are you surprised? Are you shocked by what’s happened?
LORD RICHARDS:
I’m not shocked because it’s quite normal actually that we embed pilots, naval officers, army officers with our allies. I’m a little surprised perhaps that it hasn’t been explained to parliament, but this really is politics and I don’t think I’m qualified to speak about it.

ANDREW MARR:
Well let’s move onto the caliphate, which is what the Prime Minister seems to call it itself. He wants to crush the caliphate, he wants to destroy it. How could that possibly be done militarily? They’ve got, what, between fifty and a hundred thousand quite hardened fighters now out there.

LORD RICHARDS:
Well I don’t know if that’s the correct figure in terms of …

ANDREW MARR:
There are lots of figures all over the place.

LORD RICHARDS:
Yeah, I think it’s probably a little bit less. But it can be done if you think about what happened in 2003 when the American led alliance destroyed Saddam’s much more capable and bigger army.

ANDREW MARR:
But with tanks and with troops …

LORD RICHARDS:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
… not bombing from the air.

LORD RICHARDS:
No you won’t … I mean I think the government has been quite clear that it won’t
succeed through bombing alone. I personally think if your objective is to get rid of ISIS, which is what the Prime Minister and others have said, then we now need to look again at the strategy. I don’t think it’s sufficient, the strategy, to succeed and meet its ends – and a strategy’s simply a plan so you look at what your objective is: the end is to get rid of ISIS. The way – how you do it and the means and resources you apply to it – now need to be looked at again. The current strategy won’t work in the time I think we’ve got available.

ANDREW MARR:
So that means troops on the ground, doesn’t it?

LORD RICHARDS:
It doesn’t necessarily. The current strategy is essentially one of equipping and training others to do the hard stuff for us. I think that could work, but the scale of effort going into it is woefully insufficient.

ANDREW MARR:
So we would have to pour in both material but also support and training for the Kurds as well as the government in Baghdad at a much greater level?

LORD RICHARDS:
I think more than that. I’ve been slightly misquoted in saying we need a sort of World War Two type level of effort, of vision, of leadership, of effort, but it’s that sort of thing. If we really want to get rid of them – and I think all the other parts of the strategy are also necessary, the more political ones – if you really want to get rid of them, we need to effectively get on a war footing.

ANDREW MARR:
I just want to be a little bit clearer about what that would actually mean. Does that mean sending in more special forces or what because clearly bombing by itself may be holding them back a little bit, but it’s not stopping them strengthening?

LORD RICHARDS:
It’s not and nor will the six to eight additional aircraft that we have deployed out
there, added to the I think it’s 6 per cent of the overall effort, added to the 94 per cent that is essentially American, make a decisive difference in Syria. So that is why I’m saying we need to revisit the strategy, examine how long it will take. My own view is the existing one could be made to work – that is without British and other allied troops right up in the frontline; but if it doesn’t - I would give us about a year to get it right – then I think we need to look at it again because either change your objectives or change your strategy.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Absolutely. So you wouldn’t be in principle against American and British troops actually getting involved on the ground to destroy ISIS before it becomes impossible to defeat?

**LORD RICHARDS:**
I would not be in principle because that is all about what strategy is. If those are your objectives and the ways and means you’re applying to achieve your objectives aren’t going to work, you have to do whatever’s required or change your objectives. And I agree utterly with the Prime Minister and most other people that we need to remove ISIS, the caliphate, because it’s a lure and an attraction on all those others that may just be tempted to do things that we all abhor.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And do we still have the power to get rid of it if we really want to?

**LORD RICHARDS:**
Well “we” of course should be a massive allied operation …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Yes.

**LORD RICHARDS:**
… and I think properly brought together with proper leadership, with proper command and control, it’s a very doable proposition. But I worry that what we call in the army “dribbling” instead of clouting, if we dribble – which is really rather what
we’re doing at the moment – then it’s simply firing up the problem rather than dealing with it.

**ANDREW MARR:**
That’s very interesting because we’re now in a situation of course where after a long time the government has now said it will commit itself to the 2 per cent increased national budget for defence and so forth. The Prime Minister’s been quite clear that he wants that money spent on Special Forces, commandoes and particularly on electronic intelligence gathering. Is that the right thing for the Prime Minister to be saying to the armed forces?

**LORD RICHARDS:**
Well I think undoubtedly he’s right to a degree and I’m sure he wasn’t excluding other options. But there’s a very bright American general called H.R McMaster who came over to Britain the other day and rightfully reminded everybody that the point where you can trade numbers for technology have probably been reached. Something like Iraq, Syria now needs numbers. We’ve put in two hundred trainers. To be frank, as good as they are, they’re rather lost in the noise of the scale of the problem. So mass matters in war.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And you said I think in your memoirs that taking the army right down to its current size was on balance probably a mistake. Are you saying, to be absolutely clear about this, the army’s numbers need to rise so that, if we want to, we are in a position in a year or two years’ time to go to war in Iraq and Syria and defeat ISIS?

**LORD RICHARDS:**
I think it’s not only for what might happen in Iraq or Syria. I mean it’s more broad.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Sure.

**LORD RICHARDS:**
If you look at the world, it’s pretty fragile. If the territorial army and the reserve study works and the thirty thousand active servicemen from the reserves that that implies
can be produced, then maybe there’s less of a case. But that’s not going brilliantly. I give it fair wind, I have talked about it as a bold experiment, I think, but if that doesn’t work then I think people like me in a year or two will be saying come on, you’ve got to revisit the assumption.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Do you think the time is right for a complete reset and a rethink about our attitude to ISIS and Iraq and Syria? We had that vote, which we’ve talked about already. Do you think the Commons, do you think politicians now need to look at the whole thing completely again – we’ve got the Prime Minister’s speech tomorrow – and take us into a new era on this?

**LORD RICHARDS:**
Well that’s effectively what I’m saying, Andrew. I think if the political leadership here and in America and in many other countries say they need to and want to deal with ISIS - and in a way I can cop out, it’s not really for me, that’s a political decision - all I am saying, and people like me, is if that’s your aim then you’d better get the ways and means sorted out because it’s not going to be achieved. And I do think we have to get on with it because of this lure that ISIS is. Not in aggregate terms – it’s only a small number of Muslims – but they’re going to be drawn to it.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And it’s spreading.

**LORD RICHARDS:**
It’s spreading.

**ANDREW MARR:**
It’s spreading across the North of Africa. I mean these attacks in Tunisia were clearly designed to destabilise Tunisia, one of the countries who had a relatively successful Arab Spring Revolution. And then there’s Morocco and the Moroccan fight has been brought in by ISIS. What can we do, do you think, to make sure that this sort of toppling, this domino effect along the coast of Africa stops?
LORD RICHARDS:
And of course it is actually wider. East Africa is threatened.

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

LORD RICHARDS:
I have to say the gulf nations are under threat too, so it’s not just Iraq and Syria. I mean this is why it needs a new grand strategy - without over flogging this – which takes into account a much broader set of requirements. And I think in a way – this is what I was trying to get at in the analogy I was drawing with World War Two – it’s that scale of vision and effort that, as much as their hearts are in the right place, political leaders right round the world have not yet understood is required.

ANDREW MARR:
If I was listening to you, I would say this is a man who thinks in his bones that sooner or later tanks are going to have to roll, there’s going to have to be troops on the ground and we’re going to have to defeat these people in the old-fashioned traditional way.

LORD RICHARDS:
I … I suspect my bones are telling me that, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:
That’s very, very interesting. One last thing before we finish. Another part of the world. Do you think that Putin is a real threat to the Baltic States? We’ve seen military exercises off the coast and around there, but we don’t have British troops in there, as it were, providing a trip wire or American troops at this stage. Is that going to be the next thing that has to happen?

LORD RICHARDS:
It’s a very serious issue. My own private – well it’s not private clearly, I’m about to tell everyone (Marr laughs), my personal view is that Russia does not intend to do that, that we need to reach an accommodation with Russia. The deal over Iran, I think shows that these things can happen. It’s not too fanciful to think that maybe Iran can
be brought into it. For me, the real existential threat confronting us all is actually Muslim extremism and therefore …

ANDREW MARR:
The so-called caliphate?

LORD RICHARDS:
Yes. And the states now need to put their differences behind them, come together in a new grand alliance and sort that problem out.

ANDREW MARR:
Lord Richards, thank you very much indeed.

INTERVIEW ENDS