

Occasional Paper

BRITISH DEFENCE AND SECURITY POLICY: THE MARITIME CONTRIBUTION

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In contemporary British geo-strategic, political and military debates, there is a need to assess the importance of maritime forces and the use of the sea in Government defence and security policy and in public consciousness as a whole. This report analyses the discussions at a series of closed workshops, hosted by the Royal United Services Institute's Maritime Studies Programme, held in the autumn of 2007 and the spring of 2008.* The workshops examined the likely nature of the future geo-strategic environment; how this might shape the core principles and objectives of British defence and security policy; and the military forces, in particular those operating at sea, that are needed to support these principles and objectives. The workshops tackled the critical issue of whether the use of the sea remains important to the UK and if so, is this understood by key decision-makers within government?

The report draws the following principal conclusions:

- In the evolving security environment, the UK needs to assess whether its global influence is fundamental to security policy and affordable. It must also assess how influence should be delivered in the context of its international relations, alliances and in the use of the military instrument whether as a matter of choice or obligation
- The UK is one of only a handful of truly global powers, but needs to re-evaluate its roles and responsibilities within the international system, including the need to contribute substantially to security at sea
- There is a need to improve national awareness of the importance of sea-borne trade not only to the British

economy, but also to the maintenance of security and stability in the wider global economy

- The UK's current and short-term military operational tasking dominates debate over military requirements and is in danger of precluding an objective evaluation of longer term security policy and military strategy. Maritime military capability typically requires long-term strategic vision and commitment to long-term expenditure
- The list of military tasks,¹ which is a key feature of British defence policy and force driver, should be reviewed with a view to addressing maritime security operations such as protection of trade and other economic interests beyond UK territorial seas and contiguous zones specifically
- A present and future challenge which is at the heart of the maritime debate is to balance the requirements for maritime high-intensity combat capability against the ability to deliver global presence to deter strategic threats and to meet this revised set of military tasks
- The need is to identify an appropriate and affordable size and mix of naval capability adequate for high intensity combat, and contributes effectively to international security and stability in the long term in ways that are appropriate to the nation's geostrategic situation, its relationships with strategic partners and its perception of long-term global roles.

The Future Strategic Context

The UK's Position in the World

In assessing the importance of the use of the sea, it is necessary to understand both the UK's current and likely future global roles, and how in the longer term the UK will exercise power. In his last months as Prime Minister, Tony Blair proposed a public debate about the UK's role.² Much of the workshops' discussions focused on the roles of major

* The workshops were attended by representatives of RUSI, the Royal Navy, the Ministry of Defence, other government departments, the Houses of Parliament, political researchers, industrialists from the naval ship building and commercial maritime sectors, specialist defence press, analysts and academics.

powers in the global structure, and the UK's perceived and actual position in that structure. While some might not see the UK as a great power any more, it continues to act as such in aspiring to influence events. From the UK's perspective its position as a one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council bestows upon it particular global responsibilities.

To be a benign 'global power' implies a responsibility to support the international system, including maintaining good order at sea. The UK's new cross-government national security strategy, 'Security in an Interdependent World', describes the extent to which the UK still sees itself as a state with global interests.³ The international system is becoming increasingly globalised and a challenge for the UK is to understand its responsibilities and requirements within the system.

However, maintaining great power status today and into the future will require considerable investment – political and social, as well as financial – and raises the question of which nations are prepared to make such investments, and for what purposes. Viable military capability is one pillar of support for policy in which the UK has majored and this is an unavoidable factor in UK's defence expenditure. It is, however, difficult to articulate the justification in public policy. The UK's annual planned spending on defence is not increasing significantly.⁴ However, the UK's global role and influence may be increasing in this respect because other nations, such as European allies and partners, are reducing defence spending in relative terms.

Globalisation

Globalisation is a dominant trend of the future environment. A feature of globalisation is the movement of trade, people and intellect across a very complex global web. Globalisation is not dismantling the state system, but it is changing the way in which states operate within it.

Globalisation promotes greater international co-operation, but there are negative aspects. It increases the perception of the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' and can fuel radicalisation and conflict, in particular with regard to resources such as energy, food and water. Globalisation also enhances the impact of events overseas on the UK. Thus, the role of military forces in a globalised world and of navies in supporting national interest and wider global stability require careful definition.

Future Threats

In terms of perceived threats to the UK, current debate is dominated by potential asymmetric threats, notably transnational terrorism. The National Security Strategy argues that today '[no] state threatens the United Kingdom directly'.⁵ Yet, with enduring risk that states' interests will

conflict, the strategy acknowledges that 'over the longer term [the UK] cannot rule out a possible re-emergence of a major state-led threat'.⁶ History is littered with strategic shocks, and the global political balance is likely to remain in the medium term as unstable as it is today.⁷ When explaining its arguments for renewing the UK's independent strategic nuclear deterrent, the Government argued that the unpredictability of the future – and particularly the roles of states within that unpredictable future – mandated the precaution of retaining its deterrent capability. When considering the context for developing future conventional forces, the need to take similar precautions applies also.

It is harder to predict particular threats than it is to make broad judgments about the future. There is a need to balance force development against the threats which are most likely to emerge and those which are most difficult to address.⁸ The strategic disposition of Iran in the Middle East and central Asia will prescribe continued Western interest. The emergence of China and India as major regional and global actors will be a significant factor into the longer term. For this reason, and because of the political fertility of some sub-regions and individual states for nurturing asymmetric threats such as transnational terrorism, the political spotlight of the US has swung towards the Asia-Pacific region. The political growth of Europe may compensate, although the speed and direction of Europe's future development remains unclear.⁹ Europe's future perspectives also will be influenced by the re-emergence of Russia as a military, political and (potentially) economic regional and global power.

Implications for the Royal Navy

These trends have implications for the use of the sea and for the role of the Royal Navy in protecting British interests. India and China are both building navies which will give them significant regional and global influence. India, with its vast population and considerable technology base, is building more than thirty new destroyers and frigates, a significant submarine flotilla and is equipping its navy with nuclear and supersonic cruise missiles. China has growing interests in the Gulf and in Africa. An increased Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean would create challenges not only for India, but also for major Western countries with interests in the region.

Developing naval platforms across the board, China sees its navy as fundamentally important in protecting its interests in the Asia-Pacific region and further afield. Indeed, the apparent upgrading of a naval base on the southern island of Hainan highlights the role of the People's Liberation Army (Navy) in supporting China's 'string of pearls' strategic concept, under which it is extending its military capability and influence across South Asia, through the Indian Ocean and to the Gulf and Africa, to secure access to critical resources.¹⁰

Still the world's second largest nuclear power, Russia sees its navy as a significant power projection tool. The recent deployment of the aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov battlegroup on a six-month deployment through Northern and Mediterranean waters surprised Western navies with the deployment of six, very capable, warships at distance for so long. Russia has already probed UK airspace with its Bear-F maritime patrol aircraft. Is it possible that its submarines – assets viewed by outgoing President Vladimir Putin as central to Russian global power projection – could be used to probe British waters too?

None of these states present an immediate threat to the UK. Yet, in terms of gauging trends, each is upgrading its navy, perceiving the sea as having enduring importance to their own interests.

Maritime forces also are also important in offsetting asymmetric threats such as trans-national terrorism and piracy. The ungoverned nature of the high seas presents terrorists with the opportunity to move personnel and materials in an environment less regulated than the air or land. The maritime trade network, with assets at sea and ashore, remains vulnerable to terrorist attack. Increasing levels of piracy may have an increasing impact on UK interests.

A New Strategic Defence Review?

There is a need to develop understanding of the purposes of military forces and the kinds of conflict and contingency for which they might be used. The UK's strategic vision is to use its armed forces to defend national territories, to enable access to areas of strategic interest and to support international peace and security. With global strategic interests, the ability to operate effectively at distance emphasises the importance of the maritime environment to the UK.

The 1998 Strategic Defence Review (SDR) remains the principal statement of British defence policy and military strategy as confirmed by subsequent White Papers and policy statements. The SDR underlined the importance of maritime forces in supporting an expeditionary defence posture:

In the post Cold War world, we must be prepared to go to the crisis, rather than have the crisis come to us. ... Maritime forces are inherently well suited to most force projection operations. Their reach, ability to sustain themselves without reliance on host nation support and flexibility are invaluable attributes. A joint maritime force often provides the opportunity for early and timely intervention in potential crises.¹¹

As well as providing access to all areas of the globe, maritime forces are self-contained fighting units. They enable the involvement of other military capability are able to bring

political influence to bear in routine operations, for example through presence and other contributions to diplomacy.¹²

Some workshop participants argued that the SDR has a sound foreign policy context.¹³ The UK has ridden through a series of strategic shocks in the last twenty-five years. However, the fear was expressed that the UK also is riding its luck. Moreover, in the ten years since SDR, policy and practice have diverged and operational commitments have not received appropriate levels of funding.

Is a review of defence policy required?¹⁴ Some argued simply for an audit of current policy to establish where it falls short. Some suggested a full defence review, perhaps generated independently of government, for example by parliament. Others argued for a regular review, similar to the US Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) process.¹⁵ The publication of the National Security Strategy is also relevant. Defence policy should be coherent with this strategy and there is a strong argument that this should be demonstrated publicly.

Although an open defence review process may make the public more aware of what is required in defence posture and spending, the public would not necessarily welcome a radical debate on defence at this stage. Any increase in defence spending would have an impact on other priorities. A public debate could indeed result in a reduction of defence spending in favour of other priorities.

Does the UK Need a Navy?

In previous centuries, the need for a navy has been something of a presumption in British society (the government, the people and the trading infrastructure). This presumption does not appear to exist today, although there has been no high profile public debate.

The workshop discussions established five principal reasons for the UK to maintain a navy which is robust in size, posture and capability:

- Deterring and, when necessary, fighting wars, at home and abroad
- Protecting UK trade and other interests (both at home and abroad), including ensuring free use of the sea and access to Sea Lines of Communication (SLoCs) and maritime choke points, along and through which military forces and trade move¹⁶
- Support for British diplomacy, for instance through presence and other specific actions
- Contributing to global stability and security
- Bolstering the UK's international standing.

However, these factors may not resonate with the British public.

The Royal Navy as a War-fighting Force

The high-end military capability possessed by navies enables them to engage in combat, deter conflict, provide political influence and status and ensure free use of the sea. Each element is critical to British defence and security policy. Apart from engaging in combat, navies achieve these tasks through the presence they generate by going to sea on a daily basis. Now, despite the UK's enduring global profile, the reduced size of the Royal Navy is thinning this capability for presence and compromising the UK's ability to meet its defence and security aspirations. It should not be a matter of having to choose between maintaining a war-fighting capability today and building a navy with the ability to protect UK's trade interests and, in the longer-term, to deter threats and to maintain international security and stability. Both are important to the UK.

There has been much academic and military debate about the re-emergence of major power confrontation in the longer term. The line of argument, that military forces of nations such as the UK should be configured specifically to address the modest possibility of major inter-state war in this timeframe, is crude. The real issue is denial of the option for emerging powers to see the military instrument as useful in allowing them to pursue policies of self interest in an antagonistic way. It is not necessary to speculate whether China, Russia, Iran or any other potential major power should be the focus of conventional deterrence. They may provide benchmarks, but it is inherent or existential non-directed deterrence for which capability should be provided. With rising unit costs and declining numbers of platforms, there is an inevitability that in the longer term the UK's military contribution will need to be strategically specialised in relation to the US and Europe. In the context of the latter, the important question is which nations should be the obvious providers of substantial core maritime capability. France, Italy and Spain will also be having these debates about balance among capabilities. In the hunt for major maritime contributors, it seems to be clear for geostrategic reasons where British priorities should lie in this respect.

The Royal Navy and British Maritime Trade

It is often stated that 95 per cent of the world's trade by bulk travels by sea. The amount of global sea-borne trade is growing, having quadrupled since the 1960s. In the UK, it has increased by 170 per cent since 2000, delivering today £1.25 million in value per hour. It is the UK's third largest commercial sector after tourism and finance. There is a growing global demand for goods, the need to supply them 'just in time', and the costs of transport by sea are reducing relative to other means. It is likely, therefore, that the predominance of the sea for delivering global trade will endure indefinitely.¹⁷

Two recent events emphasise the direct significance of the sea to the British public. When the MV Napoli grounded off the Devon coast in January 2007, goods ranging from cosmetics to pet food to large supplies of raw materials to motor vehicles and parts were washed up on the Devon coast. And the recent crisis in Kenya resulted in a shortage of green vegetables on UK shelves.

A properly-configured navy supports the development of international trade. Yet, amongst political leaders and the general public, there is a lack of awareness, knowledge and understanding of the importance of maritime trade to the UK, in particular the delivery of every day goods 'just in time'. The commercial shipping industry is acutely aware of this lack of concern.

The Commercial Shipping Industry

The UK's shipping industry is growing rapidly. There is a reliance on a 'just in time' approach for trade delivery and there is concern in the industry at both the government's apparent lack of focus on trade protection and the ever-smaller size of the Royal Navy. Much of the UK's trade is carried by foreign vessels, but government needs to publicly acknowledge the importance of free and timely flow of shipping for the economy and security of the UK, and its own responsibilities for its enablement.

Commercial ship owners see a range of threats and vulnerabilities in their industry, and are keen to understand what the UK Government intends to do, and what the Royal Navy is able to do, to address them. The UK's stated military tasks are important in defining UK defence policy and force development. Perhaps the most significant issue here is that trade protection outside of UK waters is not a formal military task. Thus, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) can develop neither ship numbers and capabilities nor operational routines with trade protection in mind.¹⁸

With only around twenty-five surface combatants in the Royal Navy compared with a UK commercial fleet numbering 900 ships, numbers clearly are a challenge.¹⁹ There is a need to develop the relationship between the Royal Navy and commercial shipping. In particular, the Royal Navy should be able to contribute to greater presence in and around SLoCs and choke points.

Securing Sea Lines and Choke Points

In an international system where states rely on strong relations with others to survive and prosper, it does not appear to be in the interests of most states to disrupt the maritime trade network by threatening to close or by actually closing a SLoC or choke point. However as many states come to rely increasingly on sea-borne trade, conflicting interests may see crises emerge over access to SLoCs and choke points. Great powers have traditionally taken responsibility for ensuring access. In the evolving security context,

globalisation has changed the emphasis in maritime trade from protecting national imports and exports to protecting the trade network as a whole. The international community needs to take responsibility for this access. With as many as 40,000 ships now moving along the global maritime trade network, securing such access is ever more challenging and important. Developing coherent international approaches and regulations, and encouraging states to commit resources and assets to meet such responsibilities, are central to resolving such challenges.²⁰ The UK should both contribute significantly and for geostrategic and economic reasons be a leader in this development.

Yet protecting such access is also a matter of national obligation, in terms of protecting national interest directly. With an increasing global reliance on sea-borne trade and increased competition for access and resources, ensuring access to this network of routes will be vital in supporting British interests and in effecting British policy. The global maritime trading system is so intertwined that a crisis between two states may have implications for states not directly involved in the crisis. The sheer size of this network and the number of ships and volume of trade moving through it raises the question as to whether the Royal Navy still has the capacity to ensure the free and safe use of such routes in both peace and wartime.

There is the question of the credibility of threats to SLoCs and choke points. The Al-Qa'ida attack on the MV Limburg in the Straits of Hormuz in 2002 did cause a short spike in oil and insurance market prices. However, it did not succeed in blocking the Straits or in affecting the global shipping market. Some have argued that the maritime trading system, with historically proven ability to withstand disruption, is sufficiently robust and flexible to be able to adapt to small-scale attacks. However, the longer-term closure of, for example, the Suez Canal, would see an extra five weeks added to transit time. Would sufficient commercial ships be available to cope with the extra transit distance and time, bearing in mind the UK's dependence on 'just in time' delivery?

In peacetime trade protects itself as demand drives the market. However, trade is not able to protect itself in wartime. Yet the resilience of the system in peacetime is not a reason to assume that it is indestructible. While the UK has military tasks which protect UK waters and strategic assets such as ports, such is the importance of the timely arrival of overseas trade to the UK that there is a case to be made for including SLoC and choke point protection beyond UK waters as a military task. Consequently, the Royal Navy's force levels and structure should be built with the capacity to protect and support British and wider international trade infrastructure and interests.

Military Requirements

In addressing the strategic context, the MoD will develop a force structure for the Royal Navy based on capability requirements for meeting the military tasks prescribed by this context. The UK's planned fleet of two Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers, six or more Type-45 Daring class destroyers, plus an as-yet undetermined number of Future Surface Combatants (FSC), at least seven Astute class submarines, major amphibious capabilities, and supporting programmes, will ensure the Royal Navy retains its rank of as a '2:1' class navy behind the United States Navy (USN).²¹ Yet despite the political and military value each programme will deliver across the first half of this century, the numbers of Type-45 destroyers and Astute submarines have been reduced because of cost and, at the time of writing, no build contract has actually been placed for the carriers despite firm government statements that the programme will go ahead.²² At a time of reduced budgets and significant defence inflation, forces structured for major war are less affordable. The cost issue has also led to a debate about whether the UK should re-balance its force structure to deliver a smaller number of larger, more costly, more capable platforms, able to contribute high-end military effect across the spectrum of operations, or instead greater numbers of smaller, less capable platforms designed to support requirements for maritime security operations (MSO).²³

However, if capability is traded for numbers because of money, there is a risk that the Royal Navy will fall between two stools. There is a need both to retain numbers of ships and capability. No matter how capable, a ship cannot be in two places at once.²⁴

Given the increasing importance of the sea to the UK, it was argued at the workshops that the current government has been profoundly irresponsible in forcing the Royal Navy to give up significant numbers of core capabilities because of cost, risking longer term ability to continue to deliver presence and to be able to fight a major conflict. Furthermore, the cost issue is not just affecting the numbers and capabilities of platforms. With less numbers to meet more tasks, there is an increased emphasis on a vibrant support infrastructure to ensure greater platform availability. Yet the purchasing power of the defence budget is reducing because of the enduring nature of current operations, because major defence programme costs are increasing at a higher rate than inflation, and because of the bow-wave in programme planning (with several naval programmes, notably Astute and Type-45, running late and over budget). As a result, the purchase of fewer ships is being funded in part, according to some, by hollowing out the support infrastructure which is there to keep the fleet at sea. Slashing force levels and support infrastructure to offset short-term financial constrictions may result in the Navy being unable to respond when needed in the future.

The UK Naval Shipbuilding Industry

The defence industry is responsible for building the Royal Navy's ships and submarines and, to a greater extent today, for maintaining them in-service. The UK's naval shipbuilding industry is downsizing to just one ship-building company – BVT Surface Fleet Solutions.²⁵ The ship-building industry delivers significant economic value to the UK.²⁶ Yet, if the UK had no requirement for naval ships, there would be no naval ship-building industry. However, the UK does have such a requirement, and the ability to meet it indigenously provides sovereign capability.

Making the Case

Making the case for a navy for a maritime nation like the UK should be easy because the sea remains its natural and most significant connection to the rest of the world. Central to making an effective case is highlighting the positive role armed forces play in supporting government policy. Some assess that the Royal Navy's profile in this context as the lowest of the three services. In securing a new generation of aircraft carriers, surface ships and submarines, the Royal Navy has managed to win the debate over particular programmes – even if some of the victories have been pyrrhic. Yet some argue that it has lost the wider campaign about its strategic importance to the UK. The out-of-sight nature of naval forces, and the fact that their effectiveness is gauged in no small part by how they ensure that things do not happen, makes 'sea blindness' – a term used to describe an apparent political and public lack of awareness of the importance of the use of the sea – somewhat inevitable and certainly difficult to overcome.

One of the most significant challenges facing the Royal Navy is the dominant political and public focus on operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. There is a view that business cases for future defence programmes must show relevance to current operations. Many of the broadsides levelled at the Royal Navy's specific programmes and wider political cases are based on superficial analyses of an apparent lack of relevance to these operations. One should note that the naval contribution has been and continues to be significant. For example, with navies crucial in shaping the early phases of conflict, operations in Afghanistan were spearheaded by five coalition aircraft carriers (three American, one French, and one British), with the carriers deploying fixed and rotary wing aircraft, as well as ground troops. A British SSN, HMS *Trafalgar*, is also understood to have fired the first shot of the campaign, a cruise missile. Moreover, the political and public abhorrence over Iraq in particular, and concerns regarding US posturing over Iran, have reduced the appetite of many (politicians and public alike) to engage in further long-term land interventions, particularly where legal and moral responsibilities for governance are a consequence of military action, in the immediate future. With its ability to poise

sovereign military capability in international waters, a navy is well suited to fill this potential void.

Conceptually, a Queen Elizabeth class carrier, with its Joint Combat Aircraft (JCA) – the preferred solution for which is the US F-35B Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter – could make a fundamental contribution to British defence policy and its wider political influence. With flexibility in location, role and posture, and in capability to support operations across the spectrum of tasks, it would have the capability to deter potential adversaries but, should deterrence fail, to deliver significant offensive strike capability to support operations ashore with a reduced warfighting and logistics footprint. The strength of this argument relies on the tenet that Britain's military capability is largely a principal national instrument for global influence.

A strong navy inspires national confidence, and makes a statement about the kind of power a state wishes to be and how it wishes to exist within society. A strong navy will also deter strategic threats to a nation; in other words, potential adversaries seeking areas of weakness to exploit. A maritime nation with inadequate sea power will be a dependent nation. The Royal Navy must continue to show its worth as a warfighting force, and such capability enables it to have significant effect in supporting trade and undertaking other peacetime operations.

Yet perhaps the Royal Navy's – or, indeed, any navy's – unique contribution is the presence it provides simply by being at sea on a daily basis, and the deterrence that this presence presents to threats to national interest, whether they be military, economic, or other. Early use of navies as diplomatic instruments to contribute to preventing the development of conflict and to shaping the security environment can be the only military option when diplomatic arrangements are not in place for the insertion of land forces or movement of ground based air forces into theatre. The effects are difficult to measure and the only true test of the need could well be the absence of this capability when a head of government needs broad options at short notice. And it bears mention that the capabilities that MSOs require have this powerful diplomatic use as well if they are clearly associated in the perceptions of actors with substantial maritime capability that could be in the offing if the security situation deteriorates.

There remains a need to communicate these arguments to the right people in the right way. It likely will be difficult to influence a government unless that government is well disposed towards its armed forces and has understanding of their importance in supporting UK interests at home and abroad. When defence spending is severely constrained and unlikely to increase significantly enough for enable resources to be matched to commitments, a critical question remains. The use of the sea may be fundamental to the future of the

UK, but how can a robust case be made for the importance of a navy in supporting that use? The British Government clearly cannot accept strategic failure in Afghanistan or Iraq for moral as well as political reasons. A general election would present the opportunity to any party in government for a defence review process which should be well grounded in national security and foreign policy and, most importantly, should address the longer term - something that the so-called British pragmatic approach is unsuited to doing.

If the maritime contribution is to be clearly defined, it is essential that all stakeholders contribute to making the case including commercial, financial and insurance sectors. Indeed, many recent seminars held in the UK and elsewhere on maritime security issues have seen greater cross-agency representation, particularly from security and organised crime agencies.

Perhaps the most important stakeholder of all, however, is the taxpayer. There is a need to demonstrate to taxpayers how the tasks the navy undertakes, out of sight and out of mind, affect and shape their lives. While the shelves remain stocked, this may be difficult to do. However, the UK would not wish to wait for the moment when the goods stop coming, when the shelves are empty and when 'just in time' becomes 'just too late'. At that point, the situation will become a government priority, but the key is making it a priority before it becomes a problem.

Scanning the horizon, the UK may not see many clear enemies, but it should see many states investing in navies. Much of the political and media focus falls upon the cost – and not the value – of defence equipment. For example, from the Treasury's viewpoint, the cost of warships is significant, but the real measure of value should be in the securities they deliver to the UK in deterring conflict and in protecting economic and wider interests. Assessing this value is not easy where deterrence, reassurance and conflict prevention are key outcomes.

The UK Government argues that it has been investing in the Royal Navy: indeed, Secretary of State for Defence Des Browne told the House of Commons that its plan 'to spend approximately £14 billion on naval equipment in the next 10 to 15 years ... constitutes historic investment in our Navy, which will significantly increase its capability.'²⁷ Yet, notwithstanding the improved capability and availability of modern warships, the fact that the Royal Navy has been cut in half since the end of the Cold War should send a sharp message to all those concerned that the Royal Navy no longer has the capacity to support interests – both military and economic – which are fundamental to the longer term security of the UK.²⁸

Conclusion

The first responsibility of government is defence of the realm, and a fundamental purpose of armed forces is to deter threats to peoples, territories and interests. A state can only deter threats with the capability to do so. Predicting the future remains difficult, if not impossible. However, it is incumbent upon governments to plan carefully for a broad range of eventualities. In the future strategic environment, the globalisation of trade, increased global interconnectivity, future threats, future military operations and climate change all appear to mandate a requirement, for maritime powers, for the sustained, but scalable and flexible hard and soft power provided by a navy.

The UK's position as a global actor is likely to remain pivotal to UK strategy, with the aim being for the UK to make a sufficiently significant contribution with its national military capability to ensure that its political positions are taken into account. Yet there needs to be an improved understanding of the UK's vital national interests, of the link between grand strategy, national security strategy and military strategy in building a credible and fully funded military posture and capability to protect these interests in the short and longer terms. Doing so is difficult enough without the added pressure of short-term political cycles.

The need for a navy is defined not by the existence of other navies but by a state's reliance on the use of the sea for political, military, economic and other purposes. This requires navies to be able to protect national interest, to fight – and perhaps most importantly – deter conflict, and to make a strong contribution to the maintenance of the security of the international system through developing sufficient autonomous, non-dependent capability supporting a coherent and viable political context. The UK is a maritime nation, reliant on the sea for security, resources, trade and, ultimately, prosperity. The Royal Navy remains essential to the UK, yet its ability to meet these strategic requirements is threatened by its ever-reducing capacity. Without a navy with the strength and flexibility to adjust to sharp changes in the security environment Britain may well be weaker, more dependent on others, and with its future thus subject to greater risk.

Notes

¹ The list of military tasks, in its public form, has been regularly presented in White Papers, and are an important contributor to public understanding of Government's expectations of UK military forces. The UK's Military Tasks are as follows (see: 'Delivering Security in a Changing World', Defence White Paper, Command 6041-I (Norwich: The Stationery Office, 2003), pp. 4-5):

- Standing Strategic Tasks: Military Task (MT) 1.1 Strategic Intelligence; MT 1.2 Nuclear Deterrence; MT 1.3 Hydrographic, Geographic and Meteorological Services
- Standing Home Commitments: MT 2.1 Military Aid to the Civil Authorities; MT 2.2 Military Aid to the Civil Power in Northern Ireland; MT 2.3 Integrity of UK Waters; MT 2.4 Integrity of UK Airspace; MT 2.5 Public Duties and VIP Transport.
- Standing Overseas Commitments: MT 3.1 Defence and Security of Overseas Territories; MT 3.2 Defence and Security of the Sovereign Base Areas of Cyprus; MT 3.3 Defence Diplomacy, Alliances and Support to Wider British Interests.
- Contingent Overseas Operations: MT 4.1 Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief; MT 4.2 Evacuation of British Citizens Overseas; MT 4.3 Peacekeeping; MT 4.4 Peace Enforcement; MT 4.5 Power Projection; MT 4.6 Focused Intervention; MT 4.7 Deliberate Intervention.

² This process was started by (then) Prime Minister Tony Blair's speech to a Royal United Services Institute audience aboard HMS *Albion* at Devonport, Plymouth in January 2007. For the full text of the speech, please see:

<<http://www.rusi.org/events/ref:E45A6104E7E1A8/info:public/infolD:E45A611EFEA3F2/>> or <<http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page10735.asp>>.

³ See: 'The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an Interdependent World', Cm 7291 (Norwich: The Stationery Office, March 2008).

⁴ This excludes the costs of ongoing operations funded from central funds outside the defence budget.

⁵ 'The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom', *op. cit.*, p. 3 (see also p. 15, para. 3.25).

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 16, pp. 43-46. The MoD's Development, Doctrine and Concepts Centre has argued that a return to state-on-state conflict is likely within the next fifteen or so years. 'The DCDC Global Strategic Trends Programme 2007-2036', p. 44. Available at <http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/4DFA218B-7B49-4EDB-82BD-770928C6334F/0/20071218_strat_trends_prog_U_DCDCIMAPPS.pdf>.

⁷ The UK's National Security Strategy states that 'Although we accept the need to get better at predicting future threats, we recognise that shocks are inevitable' (see: 'The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom', *op. cit.*, p. 9).

⁸ Open to question is the extent to which predicted threats should drive strategy development. Such threats clearly should be addressed, but as much as possible, strategy should remain an inherently positive, pro-active exercise. With states tied ever more closely together in the international system, there also is the question of if threats the UK anticipates are different from those which others anticipate, and whether this matters.

⁹ Europe is developing a substantial mass of maritime power which

could underpin the desires of many in the European construct for the EU to operate as a global super-state. The challenge would be how to integrate such a force effectively – both militarily and, as with any other issue in Europe, politically. It is worth noting, though, that a greater European naval capability and commitment could help to underscore on a global level the importance of navies.

¹⁰ Thomas Harding, 'China Builds Secret Nuclear Sub Base', *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 May 2008, pp. 1-2.

¹¹ 'The Strategic Defence Review', Cm 3999 (London: The Stationery Office, July 1998): Introduction, para. 6; Supporting Essay Six, para. 22, p. 6-6.

¹² *British Maritime Doctrine* defines presence as 'the exercise of naval diplomacy in a general way involving deployments, port visits, exercising and routine operating in areas of interest to declare interest, reassure friends and allies and to deter'. Royal Navy, *BR1806: British Maritime Doctrine*, 3rd edition (Norwich: The Stationery Office, 2004), p. 284.

¹³ It was argued, however, that different government departments might have both different approaches to and, in effect, different foreign policies.

¹⁴ For debate on this issue, see: Paul Smyth, Christianne Tipping, and Lee Willett. 'U.K. Defense Under Brown', *Defense News*, 10 September 2007, p. 53. The MoD also has its internal Defence Strategic Guidance, a process which itself assesses both the defence policy baseline (at present, SDR) and the affordability of the defence posture as a whole. The process, however, is focused only on the next fifteen years, whereas decisions are being made today in that context about equipment programmes which may well be in service until 2050.

¹⁵ The UK did, until 1996, produce an annual statement on the defence estimate process, when a White Paper was put forward to Parliament for discussion.

¹⁶ *British Maritime Doctrine* defines SLoCs as 'the sea routes that connect an operating military force with one or more bases of operations and along which supplies and reinforcements move. The expression is sometimes used more broadly in a strategic sense to include commercial shipping routes.' (*op. cit.*, p. 289). There are ten generally-recognised maritime choke points: the Panama and Suez Canals; the Bab Al-Mendeb, Bosphorus, Dover, Gibraltar, Hormuz and Malacca Straits; the Gulf of Aden; and the Mozambique Channel.

¹⁷ As well as being more expensive – not least because of size constraints – moving goods by land runs an increasing risk of such movement being restricted by events. Moving goods by air is not as cost-effective due to the size constraints of air transport. In terms of the 'just in time' approach, with a capacity to store in the UK only 3 per cent of required resources, the UK relies wholly on the regular and sustained delivery of resources by sea.

¹⁸ Some elements of trade protection do fall in part under other military tasks, such as military aid to civil authorities (see MT 2.1), as well as (more broadly) the UK's Comprehensive Approach for dealing with international crises.

¹⁹ It was argued at the workshops that the number of surface combatants might all the same be reduced to as few as eighteen.

²⁰ The workshops debated a variety of current and likely future challenges to the regulatory and legal frameworks relating to the use of the sea, including (1) given that resource and other security challenges are forcing states to attempt to flex their muscles over the size of and access to territorial waters, the need to ensure that

the international system, and the current legal framework within it, can ensure the use of the sea remains free. Australia, for example, recently has had its territorial seas extended under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). In the workshops, questions were raised as to whether current laws, properly upheld, can meet the challenges faced today and in the future, or whether new laws are required (2) If and how climate change and, for example, the opening of new polar routes, will spark territory and resource legal disputes. (3) Likely legal challenges to any use of force at sea. (4) The ability of international organizations, such as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the EU, and the United Nations (for example through UNCLOS), to act as vehicles for taking forward emerging legal issues.

²¹ This term was coined by Eric Grove. See: 'Medium Navies and Organic Air', in D Wilson (ed.), *Maritime War in the 21st Century*, Papers in Australian Maritime Affairs No. 8 (Royal Australian Navy, 2001), p.91. A 2:1 or upper-second class degree is one level below a first class degree.

²² The latest MoD statement on the carrier programme, issued on 20 May 2008, noted that the MoD 'was ready to go-ahead with contract signature'. While this represents a significant political step forward in a difficult process, awarding the contract remains, according to the MoD, subject to industry 'forming the joint venture company that will help build the carriers'. See: 'MoD Gives Go-ahead to Navy Carriers', MoD Press Release 084/2008, 20 May 2008.

²³ The Royal Navy's *Future Maritime Operational Concept 2007* (Authorised by the Joint Doctrine and Concepts Board, DCDC, 13 November 2007) defines maritime security as 'the level of presence, assurance and capability that is required to defend the UK homeland and sovereign territories, at range where necessary; to preserve the free, safe and lawful use of the high seas and to

protect Joint, Allied and coalition forces in oceanic and littoral areas (p. 1-22, including note 36). This includes three interrelated aspects: the security of UK mainland and overseas territories, including territorial waters and airspace; the security of the international maritime system; and the protection of the maritime infrastructure.

²⁴ Other navies are going through similar debates, looking to balance strategic aims against financial pressures. Yet while arguing for the need to develop smaller, faster, corvette-type platforms to support regional maritime security requirements, many actual programmes are still delivering frigate- and destroyer-sized ships of the 5,000-10,000 ton range.

²⁵ BVT Surface Fleet Solutions is a proposed joint venture between the last two ship-building contractors in the UK, BAE Systems Surface Ship Solutions and the VT Group.

²⁶ For example, BAE Systems ship-building generates 10,000 jobs which themselves generate an equivalent of £69,000 each in value to the UK. It employs, for example, 3,000 people in Glasgow, with their work affecting directly 1,600 other jobs. 75 per cent of BAE Systems employees work in regions needing wider development. Of every £1 BAE Systems spends on shipbuilding in Scotland, 46p goes to other industries. BAE is also the largest developer of engineering graduates and of manufactured goods in Scotland.

²⁷ Des Browne, Oral Answers, House of Commons Hansard Debates, 3 March 2008, Column 1443. See also statement by Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Minister for Defence Equipment and Support) in 'MoD Gives Go-ahead to Navy Carriers', *op. cit.*

²⁸ In 1990, the Navy's front-line forces included three aircraft carriers, forty-seven destroyers and frigates, and twenty-seven attack submarines. Under current plans, the front-line will be two carriers, twenty-five (but perhaps as few as eighteen) destroyers and frigates, and seven attack submarines.

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