

WHY THINGS DON'T HAPPEN

SILENT PRINCIPLES OF NATIONAL SECURITY

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The defence review is occurring at a time of extreme financial pressure at home and considerable military risk in Afghanistan. Yet it would be a grave failure if it attended principally – or worse, exclusively – to the clamour of those issues. The deepest principles of national security are silent. They explain why bad things don't happen and they must be given voice. This article also argues that geopolitics prescribe a primarily maritime framework for any British SDSR, and that the core strategic challenges are naval. The Royal Navy, however, has become dangerously weak. Urgent steps must be taken to reverse this trend before it is too late.

The Royal Navy is and remains the principal guardian of the *silent principles* of national security. These principles were voiced in the first Articles of War in the reign of Charles II, which state that 'It is upon the Navy, under the good Providence of God, that the Wealth, Prosperity and Peace of these Islands and of the Empire [which today we may read as the Free Trade global system that Britain gave to the world] depend.'

In 'The Royal Navy at the Brink',¹ we argued that the Royal Navy was on the cusp of losing coherence. We tabulated inexorable downward momentum in the commissioning rate of new surface warships and an increase in the early disposal of existing ships since 1997, despite the darkening of the strategic maritime scene. This has meant a rapidly ageing surface fleet and therefore a propensity, despite some highly task-specific Cold War specialist capabilities running on, to reduce overall fleet utility. The trend of British maritime decline has not altered since our 2007 analysis. How could it? The downward momentum in naval construction requires decisive action to reverse it, which in turn will not occur without a compelling and clear understanding of the reasons to do so.

So three years on, our projections both of the Royal Navy's future fleet strength and of the threats to international maritime security now seem, if anything, over-optimistic. We must therefore revisit our earlier paper. In particular, we are frustrated by the continuing lazy category mistake, which discusses the first-order issues of national security in third-order terms of inter-service rivalry and specific equipments. In these miscast terms, the deeper, more complex and silent aspects of national security, which by their nature the maritime dimensions inhabit, can *never* be clearly heard.

The degree to which the public finances have deteriorated since 2000, combined with the consistent failure of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to articulate a balanced and funded programme, means it is even more necessary to make this case. Though the decision to reverse direction is now more difficult, it is all the more vital.

But some hold that the world situation is broadly satisfactory and under control by effective agents, and that Britain is positioned diplomatically and poised militarily roughly as it should be for its national security interest. This view certainly commanded our security policy over the last ten years

and was predicated upon two strong, but usually unspoken, assumptions. The first is that in a globalised and increasingly interdependent world, the powers of multilateral institutions and of supranational jurisdictions would wax as those of the nation-state wane. The second is that the utility of 'hard power' is being swiftly eclipsed by that of 'soft power', such as development aid.

The *locus classicus* of this view may be read in former Prime Minister Brown's only substantial foreign policy statement, his 'Mansion House speech' of 17 November 2007. It was as much the signature statement on world affairs of that premiership (and of Mr Brown's preceding stewardship of the Treasury) as former Prime Minister Blair's 22 April 1999 'Chicago speech' on humanitarian interventionism was of his. Its philosophy was given material expression in Chancellor Brown's consistent year-on-year real money increases in the budget of an independent Department for International Development, at the expense of a shrinking Foreign Office and the underfunding of MoD relative even to Blair's wars, let alone the silent principles of national security. Therefore, by the end of that administration, underfunding had reached chronic proportions. That an influential constituency still holds to this



The Royal Navy's newest warship, HMS *Dauntless*, enters her home port of Portsmouth for the first time, December 2009. *Photo courtesy of Chris Ison/PA Wire.*

view is, in our view, part of the problem. It is now inscribed in the politicised institutions and minds of a generation of MoD officials, who in turn have damaged the order of battle. Our complaint is therefore not merely technical; nor is ours a prescription for managerial adjustments. It demands a bonfire of current assumptions, plus the demolition and rebuilding of current institutions.

The Failure of Fundamental Strategic Analysis

The defence establishment as a whole faces grim problems. Despite the bleaker geostrategic outlook we describe below, and despite repeated affirmation from both past and present prime ministers that the defence and security of our nation is the first duty of any government, the defence budget is in deep trouble. It has been plausibly claimed by Bernard Gray that the cost of the defence equipment programme is currently more than £30 billion over the present allocated budget across a ten year period.² In one of his most shocking findings, Gray further calculates that up to *one third* of the current budget has been being effectively wasted as a consequence of indecision and delay.³ On top of this, much of the current equipment inventory (mainly land

and air) is being badly over-used and is consequently in increasingly poor repair. In the face of delays and gaps in equipment orders – also a product of that incoherence – the defence industry is struggling to stay afloat.

Decision-making is punctuated by financial and strategic uncertainty, industrial policy confusion and lack of clear accountability. But the nation is, as we said with others in 2008, 'at war with a peacetime mentality'. Meanwhile Whitehall strategic analysis fails to understand the risk environment that we are obliged to inhabit or the importance of studying it. Bureaucratic effort is mainly put into grading threats. In consequence, there is a fundamental failure to give due attention to understanding the manner in which threats are incubated within risk environments.⁴

Therefore the misperceived real nature of modern globalisation is compounded by the failure of bureaucracies to reliably analyse the relationships between risks and threats. This means that we prepare for the wrong future. Globalisation, in practice, is not about theoretically more benign multilateral governance as the 'Mansion House speech' world-view assumes. As we shall specify by numbers, it is actually about growing interdependence, but

with decreasingly adequate policing of the global commons. The new Australian Maritime Doctrine expresses this point succinctly, its mind sharpened by responsibility for one of the world's largest maritime jurisdictions: 'It is not just the direct trade to, from and around Australia that is in our interest ... Global economies are now so interconnected that any interruption of, or interference with, this shipping would have rapid and detrimental effects on our economy and export competitiveness as well as on those of the countries directly affected'.⁵ *Pari passu*, this statement applies to Britain.

The defence budget is in deep trouble

The other side of the globalisation coin is etched with evidence for the comprehensive weakening and erosion of the multilateral institutions upon which the 'Mansion House speech version' placed its trust. The UN is fading like the Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland*, unable to command authority in its leading initiatives on global warming and development, or to put an end to genocides and gross abuses of human rights. Increasingly, it is treated again – as it was during the Cold War – as a forum

within which nations battle nakedly for their national interests rather than confer legitimacy upwards. Likewise, the EU is facing the biggest existential crisis in sixty years with simultaneous fracturing of the three post-1991 *grand projets* of the Constitution, the euro and the Emission Trading System (ETS) Climate Policy; across the continent, it must grapple with the souring of public affection.

What is needed is a 'strategic identity review'

Such observable trends render the previous government's Defence Green Paper ideas on deepening Franco-British integration to the point that our core capabilities might become in hock to French decision-making, even more out of the national interest. France, after all, has had national priorities at systematic variance with Britain's for at least three centuries, and especially during the post-war period when French interests were leveraged through the EU 'project'. No French politician has ever knowingly taken a decision not in the French national interest. Perhaps what is needed is a 'strategic identity review', as recommended by the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England.⁶ Foreign Secretary William Hague's first major speech on the rehabilitation of British national interest in foreign policy begins this;⁷ but we need to apply Palmerstonian principles to our alliances and ensure that we possess coherent independent core capabilities to nourish them and to allow them to protect us in return.

Joint by Name, Tribal by Nature

The national institution which should translate the national will into force structure is the Ministry of Defence (MoD). In doing this, it claims to be what it patently should be, namely 'joint'. But in fact it is deeply tribal. As presently constituted, the chiefs of staff, well configured to manage current operations, are – for both structural and cultural reasons – simply incapable of solving the major issues of the defence programme. They are the prime guardians of their own service interests and are seen as

such by their personnel, making it very hard for them to agree reductions to the capability or size of their own service and strongly encouraging inter-service rivalry. The mantra of 'jointness' has become an instrument used by the Treasury to divide and rule the MoD.

This is perverse, because true 'jointness' is vital. There are today very few operations and capabilities that are not provided by the services operating jointly, and they therefore all have an interest in the preservation of capabilities of other services. Nor is this new. To take some obvious examples, the army has depended absolutely on the navy for several key evacuations under heavy fire. Evacuations during the Second World War – from Norway, Greece and Crete (jointly with the Royal Australian Navy, which involved grievous losses) – are familiar to historians; Dunkirk is etched into the national consciousness. Less well known and as vital for the national interest are operations that did *not* occur, but which might have done. One author of this paper was commander of the Royal Navy task group to the Adriatic that stood ready to lift the army out of the Balkans (from the Croatian port of Split), should that have become necessary, in January 1993. Furthermore, amphibious invasions can be poised and not undertaken, yet tie down enemy forces with material effect. Exactly this was done by the feint off the coast of Kuwait during the first Gulf War.

Conversely, masterminded by the same Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay who achieved the Dunkirk evacuation, the navy carried the army back to the continent on D-Day. It provided the immensely long Atlantic sea-bridge to the Falklands in 1982. A generation later, with the fleet already much diminished in size, good luck permitted the concentration in time of the spectrum of capabilities required to underpin Operation *Palliser* (Britain's liberation from chaos of the people of Sierra Leone in 2000). In coalition, naval airpower was the leading edge of the initial and successful entry into Afghanistan. In most of these cases amphibious and early entry challenges meant that the Royal Marines played roles the importance of which greatly exceeded the small size of the corps relative to the army.

It would be an act of self-harm for any service to denigrate, and thereby lose, the assistance it needs from the others. It is essential that a full-capability approach – in practice and not only as lip service – be taken to the defence programme. Only this will harness capabilities correctly to the full spectrum of first-order national security tasks.

Why Things Do Not Happen

We live now in a time in which wars touch few people directly. The public and the political classes no longer share our fathers' realisation that war was ever-threatening and that the first call on taxation was the protection of Britain and its citizens. Today, the assumption is that good order is a natural condition and can be taken for granted because 'nothing happens'. But that 'nothing happens' is no accident. In a wicked world, 'nothing happens' because of pre-emption or deterrence which is not, as the word has been debased to mean, purely about nuclear last-resort deterrence, but rather about the day-to-day policeman on the beat or the secret policemen patrolling cyberspace to pre-empt unconditional terrorists.

When, for instance, bombs do not detonate on the Underground, there is some recognition that deterrence is working. Where it occurs out of sight and out of mind, there is not. No one associates the full supermarket shelves, the availability of a range of other goods and the supply of fuels to power our homes, cars and industry with the free flow of sea trade. But there is no natural law that assures this flow and restricts interruptions; nor is there any natural law which protects and regulates the use of the sea for the extraction of resources, or inhibits territorial disputes at sea. The free flow that makes globalised trade and the creation of prosperity possible depends prominently upon the presence of naval units at sea, unseen and silent and therefore easily forgotten. This is the classic operation of deterrence and is an essential part of the reason why things do not happen.

Navies are also instrumental in causing things not to happen during war. Modern examples from the Bosnian and Gulf wars have already

been mentioned. This silent aspect of national security is harder to explain than the active evidence of going, doing, winning, coming home. But it is of rising importance as the post-Second World War multilateral instruments fade.

Simply to mention the word deterrence is to signal another difficulty; for the Cold War welded deterrence to nuclear means, and in the British case to submarine-basing. Since Britain did not follow the strategically coherent Soviet practice of funding nuclear systems from central funds via the Strategic Rocket Force command, but allowed their operating costs to lie upon the delivery service's budget, nuclear deterrence has produced a double distortion of British maritime thinking and practice, making it more like the French Navy's posture which is shaped primarily by the requirements of the *force de frappe*. On the one hand, it has obscured a correct understanding of maritime deterrence. On the other hand, it has distorted the Royal Navy's priorities simply because the nuclear deterrent is seen as purely naval business, and indeed is often so regarded by the navy itself.

The Globalised Maritime Environment

The dependence of the West, but especially of Britain, on the use of the sea for its survival and prosperity is a geopolitical fact of life. The sea is not occupied, like territory: it is used; and so as naval historian Julian Corbett explained, the essence of sea power is sea control. It is a fact that was once well known to the bulk of the population. British imperial power and global influence were built on its sea power, maintaining sea control by a form of extended, existential deterrence; a point crisply expressed by Rudyard Kipling in his famous 1911 poem, *Big Steamers*.⁸

The essence of sea power is sea control

Today, that recognition has sharply diminished – perhaps as the result of the rapid growth of air travel and high-speed trains – but also because of a substantial reduction in the size and visibility of the Royal Navy's surface fleet and, until very

recently, the Merchant Navy. Yet the dependence of Britain on the secure use of the sea has significantly *increased*. This phenomenon of political and public lack of awareness of our sea-dependence has been named 'sea blindness'. We have come to take for granted the flow of energy and goods, and have been distracted by our recent preoccupation with expeditionary warfare into forgetting the enduring centrality of sea power and maritime security to the enduring tasks of deterrence.

What is it that the public does not see? Habitual air travel has blinded it to the fact that aircraft lift only people and light freight: commercially, they can lift no fuel other than that required to complete their own journey. Everything else must go by sea. A single medium-sized container ship can carry around one hundred times more weight and volume than the largest freight aircraft; a large passenger ship can readily carry ten to fifteen times as many people as the largest passenger airliner. In an emergency or on expeditionary operations, that multiple can be doubled. For both commercial and military operations, safe and secure use of the sea is an absolute necessity.

Britain is axiomatically dependent on the carriage of goods by sea for its functioning as a modern economy and society. The volume and value of sea-transported goods vastly exceeds that of goods carried by other means. According to the Chamber of Shipping, 95 per cent of UK trade by volume and 90 per cent by value is carried by sea on journeys both long and short, but all indispensable. Most of these goods have to transit one of the world's eight choke points (Hormuz, Malacca Straits, Bab el Mandeb, Suez, Gibraltar, the two Cape routes, or Panama), providing easily predictable opportunities to those who may wish to interdict that flow – pirates, terrorists and opportunist governments. Eighty per cent of the world's liquid-fuel energy resources travel by sea at some point in their journey and, as recent events in the Gulf of Mexico have vividly demonstrated, an increasing proportion of these resources are extracted from the sea-bed, giving further great significance to the proper and peaceful regulation of the maritime domain.

This is the most enduring preoccupation of naval forces, as the authors of the Articles of War cited, knew and stated; and in a time of the globalisation of trade and a consequent great increase in the volume of sea transported goods, it is an expanding task, which is clearly understood by some nations. Take three very different ones.

Admiral Sureesh Mehta, former chief of the Indian Naval Staff, has stated that 'in the era of globalisation, every trading nation is necessarily a maritime nation'.⁹ Accordingly, with all-party and popular consent, India is currently constructing thirty-eight warships of all types from offshore patrol vessels to aircraft carriers and nuclear-powered attack submarines, to give material force to the admiral's words.

The Australian White Paper of 2009 specified a requirement for the Royal Australian Navy which has translated into plans for a force of twelve new submarines as successor to the *Collins* class, eight new anti-submarine warfare frigates, twenty-four helicopters, two 27,000-ton amphibious landing ships and a capability for land-attack cruise missiles deployed in guided missile destroyers. In total, the capability profile of the Australian Navy will be close to that of the US 7th Fleet, excluding nuclear attack submarines and carriers.¹⁰

Safe and secure use of the sea is an absolute necessity

According to Japanese authorities, 99 per cent of Japanese exports rely on use of the shipping lanes off Somalia.¹¹ Hence Japan is building a naval base in Djibouti, already home to large American and French military installations, in order to secure its national interests. The base will be Japan's first overseas since its defeat in 1945, and is a technical circumvention of Article VII of the 1947 'Peace Constitution'. The \$40 million base is expected to be ready early in 2011 and will provide a permanent port for ships and patrol aircraft of Japan's Maritime Self Defense Force. Japanese Navy Commander Keizo Kitagawa has said: 'We are deploying here to fight

piracy and for our self-defense. Japan is a maritime nation and the increase in piracy in the Gulf of Aden through which 20,000 vessels sail every year is worrying.'

The implication is unavoidable. Any trading nation has a critical interest in the secure use of the seas and the preservation of good order at sea. This is particularly true of Britain. But sea blindness is an intractable condition. Secretary of Defence Liam Fox has called for this blindness to be abated. The numbers are clear.¹² In the last decade, 550 million tons of goods have been handled annually in UK ports. UK register dead weight tonnage (dwt) rose 300 per cent between 1998 and 2009 to 21.3 dwt. Moreover, UK companies have a controlling interest in 40.4 million dwt. In 2009, total direct employment in UK ports and at sea was over 100,000 people. This is a very substantial industry by any standard, and a vital one for the well-being of the citizens of Britain. It is an industry that depends on good order at sea, and therefore it needs and deserves protection against the increasingly threatening environment in which it must operate.

The plain fact is that globalisation is at least as much a maritime as it is a communications phenomenon; and it is essential for our survival and prosperity that it operates in safety. The previous First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Jonathon Band, correctly called the sea the other 'superhighway' of the modern age, along with that of the information realm. The analogy is no mere hyperbole: the two superhighways are in fact one and the same. Internet traffic is mostly directed through thirteen server-hub centres – which are obvious high-value targets – and 90 per cent of global e-mail traffic is conveyed via undersea fibre-optic cables. These cables bunch in several critical sea areas (off New York, the western approaches to the English Channel, the South China Sea, Hong Kong, and off the west coast of Japan). The cables are obliged to traverse choke points too: notably the Red Sea, the Malacca Straits, and Luzon in the Philippines.¹³ Geopolitics – the relative physical positions of the major economies on the globe – prescribe this.

Diagram 1: The relationship between constabulary, diplomatic and military functions of navies.



Source: Royal Australian Navy.

What Should the Royal Navy Look Like?

The first thing we have to do in straitened times is to remind ourselves of the moral justification for taxation. When Pitt the Younger introduced taxation of income in 1798 as a temporary measure to fund the navy (principally) in the war with France, the case was that this even more intimate interference with peoples' property by the state than previous forms of taxation was justified by exceptional need. Since, in classic Lockean terms, security of the person, of property and of the state was the prerequisite for the enjoyment of any of the pursuits of happiness that life and liberty can permit, it followed – and follows – that the 'night-watchman' functions of the state have logical, practical and moral priority over any other uses of money gathered by taxation. They alone are not discretionary expenditures. Spending on the welfare state, by contrast, is discretionary. This may sound hard to modern ears, but it is so.

Therefore, within the fearsome constraints both of the risk framework and of the likely available resources crowding in upon it, what shape should

the navy be?¹⁴ Since the end of the Second World War and particularly since the withdrawal from east of Suez, the contention of successive Navy Boards has been that, if a navy of 'high' capability is procured, 'lower' level tasks (diplomatic and constabulary – which includes many deterrent duties) will automatically be covered by this 'consequent capability' – the argument of the lesser included case. As we remarked in our 2007 essay, this argument was enthusiastically employed by Mr Hoon, the then-defence secretary, to justify the failure to build new ships, and as a case for reducing fleet numbers. In fact the evidence shows that the result of this strategy is the opposite of what it intends. The argument for the lesser included case is subverted by the high-end strategy, because as well as failing to provide the numbers needed for the ubiquitous maritime security tasks (which is where, by presence, deterrence operates day-by-day) it also weakens the coherence of the power projection case. The polarisation of 'high' and 'low' intensity is a false and forced framing. The relationship between the constabulary, diplomatic and military functions of navies is more accurately represented

Table 1: Commissioning Rates of Royal Navy Cruisers and Destroyers 1918–36 and Commissioning Rates of Royal Navy Destroyers and Frigates 1980–2020.

Year	Cruisers	Destroyer Leaders and Destroyers	Year	Destroyers and Frigates
			1980	2
			1981	2
			1982	3
			1983	1
			1984	2
			1985	3
			1986	1
			1987	1
			1988	3
			1989	2
1918	7	57	1990	2
1919	7	33	1991	2
1920	1	3	1992	1
1921	1	0	1993	2
1922 ^a	3	2	1994	3
1923	0	1	1995	1
1924	1	4	1996	1
1925	1	1	1997	2
1926	2	2	1998	0
1927	0	0	1999	0
1928	5	0	2000	1
1929	4	0	2001	1
1930 ^b	3	8	2002	1
1931	1	10	2003	0
1932	0	5	2004	0
1933	2	5	2005	0
1934	2	10	2006	0
1935	3	8	2007	0
1936 ^c	2	17	2008	0
			2009	1
			2010	1
			2011	2
			2012	1
			2013	1
			2014	0
			2015	0
			2016	0
			2017	0
			2018	0
			2019	0
			2020	0

^a Five power Washington Naval Treaty: negotiated November 1921–February 1922.

^b London Naval Treaty: Five powers agree to extend capital ship moratorium to 1937, but the Axis powers start to cheat.

^c Second London Naval Treaty: nugatory without Japan, Germany and Italy.

Note: 1918 is matched to 1990 as end of war years. Projection figures based on information in *Jane's Fighting Ships 2010–11*, p. 878.

in Australian Maritime Doctrine 2010 by Diagram 1 (page 18).¹⁵ The spectrum of deterrence lies with increasing weight from the top to the bottom of the triangle.

The polarisation of 'high' and 'low' intensity is a false and forced framing

In our previous paper, we drew attention to the rapidly declining number of surface combatants available to the Royal Navy to carry out these vital, enduring daily deterrent tasks across the middle level of the Australian triangle. Table 1, documenting momentum, created much shocked reaction when first published in 2007. We have now extended it to 2020 and also added Table 2. A simple calculation extrapolated from public sources suggests the rate of decline in fleet size in the coming decade will be to a low point of nineteen vessels. But this headline number contains within it others, which are as much if not more concerning. Notably, the rapidly increasing age of the fleet means that by 2021 the *average* age of surface combatants will be twenty-one – the age that used to be regarded as the effective end of their useful lives.

It is a self-evident deduction that the number of available ships is in inverse proportion to the levels of capability (and therefore cost) of each ship. What is less obvious is that the reduced rate of ship orders (only six Type 45s have been ordered since 1997 – one every two years) threatens the viability and skill-base of the ship-building industry, the manpower base of the Royal Navy, as well as its capability and reach. It is obviously difficult to quantify and still less to specify a date at which loss of critical mass in human skill-pools occurs; but it would be reasonable to think that these key skill-pools will lose critical mass before the physical frigate and destroyer force do. It may well happen even sooner in the already much reduced submarine service, with its highly specialised and specific skill requirements. Even in the best case, the shrunken force size raises doubts

about whether the commensurately small pools of manpower, skills, experience and infrastructure that a small number of surface ships will generate (perhaps allowing a maximum of fourteen ships to be at high readiness at any given moment) provides a sufficiently substantial base to support the full amphibious capability and two aircraft carriers required for power projection. This is a less noticed consequence of the high-capability focus. Moreover, the logic that predicates the size of the surface combatant force on the requirements of providing escorts for carriers is a perverse logic for another quite different reason too, because it bases the force structure on the least likely circumstance – a major war requiring fully escorted carrier groups. It is perverse because this is the task and the circumstance in which NATO is best equipped thanks to the combined capabilities of the US Navy, and the lesser but significant escort capabilities of other European navies.

Another perverse paradox also appears. The high capability case makes the use of the power projection force more likely because the absence of a well-resourced spectrum of deterrent force, perforce, increases the likelihood of the failure of deterrence.

Finally, the cost of specialised high-capability ships (the Type 45 reputedly cost about £800 million per ship) is very likely, in the nation's dreadful financial circumstances and in the overheated state of the defence budget, either to reduce or to seriously delay the building rate of the (also costly) Type 26 and other units.

The Size and Age Dilemma

If plans to follow the Type 45 with ten high-capability anti-submarine warfare ships – the Type 26 – are implemented as currently understood, only sixteen new surface combatants will enter service between 2002 and 2031. This is a rate of building below that of any other significant maritime nation. It contrasts strikingly with countries as varied as Australia, China, India and Japan. One consequence of this is that the seventeen Type 22 and Type 23 frigates which the ten Type 26 will replace and which were built for an eighteen-year life, will be, in

Table 2: The Profile of Decline: Too Few, Too Old.

Year	Type 22	Type 23	Type 42	Type 45	Type 26	C2 (as planned)	Total	Average age
2010	4	13	5	1	0	0	23	15 years
2015	4	13	0	6	0	0	23	
2020	2	13	0	6	0	0	21	21 years
2025	0	12	0	6	4	0	22	
2030	0	7	0	6	9	0	22	
2035	0	0	0	5	10	4	19	

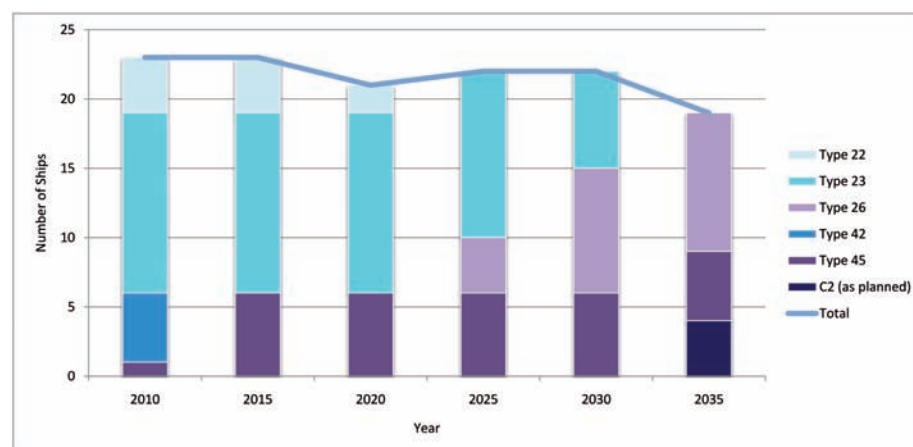
Table 2 illustrates the surface combatant force levels resulting from existing force levels and current building and disposal planning, at the midpoint of each year shown.

Note 1: Fleet average age in 2012–13 will be fifteen years; and in 2020–21 will be twenty-one years.

Note 2: Not all ships are kept in high readiness at all times. On average 75 per cent of ships may be available at any one time.

Note 3: If, as appears likely, building plans are delayed or reduced, then force levels will fall commensurately, and average fleet age will rise. The figures shown are very much a best case.

Graph 1: The number and type of ship in the Royal Navy fleet, 2010–35.



some cases, well over thirty years old, with all that implies for obsolescence and support costs. Moreover, the oldest of the two new classes is due to pay off in 2035, soon after the last enters service. The Type 26 is due to be followed by the general purpose C2, which is currently costed at only 10 per cent below the Type 26. There is a seven-year gap between the Type 45 and Type 26, presenting, even in the best case, a very difficult industrial problem. Surface combatant force numbers will drop to nineteen by 2022, compared with the thirty-two demanded by the 1998 Strategic Defence Review and the twenty-five claimed in the 2004 'rebalancing' exercise.

Most tellingly, the average age of the surface combatant ships will rise from fifteen years in 2012 to twenty-one years in 2021, with implications for sustainability, support, logistics, cost

and viability. There is also a skills-pool issue. Such a programme effectively tells the world that Britain is signing off from serious maritime security – and hence national security. Moreover, the numbers and average age figures will most likely be worse than planned. Set all this against the increasing use of the sea and its importance to British national interests within the world economy, with growing threats to good order and security in the maritime domain. Then consider what kind of industrial and naval skill-base, and surge capacity, might be necessary to meet these challenges. The picture that emerges is an alarming one. Rapid rebuilding of the general purpose fleet is essential for the present and likely core future strategic security needs of the UK. It is a non-discretionary call upon tax money to do so, and a moral as well as a practical imperative.

Real-world tasks urgently require significantly more surface combatants, of lower cost and capability. Use of the sea demands presence along the sea routes. Presence is the prerequisite for the silent deterrent messages that naval force alone can articulate. A poised force is the prerequisite for pre-emptive action. It is also the prerequisite for surprise. Surprise is often the ability to appear without warning and in force. The ships needed to fulfil these missions must have endurance, versatility, role-adaptability and number, and be cheaper. Presence demands numbers. The ability to mass and to surge a force demands numbers. Numbers are also essential for replaceability. If you cannot afford to lose a ship, you cannot afford to use it. Presence is therefore the indispensable prerequisite for deterrence.

The Way Forward

In the strategically and financially worsened circumstances of 2010, British fleet numbers are inadequate for the most fundamental, enduring and vital tasks facing the navy. The vessel known as the C2, an ocean-going frigate with a level of general-purpose capability, is – as currently conceived – the wrong ship. It must be seriously cost-constrained to about one third (or ideally rather less) of a Type 45 or Type 26, and is most urgently required, with at least ten being built in the next decade. This C2 would be a modern repetition of the successful Type 21 programme of the 1970s. However, learning lessons from defects of that programme, one should stress that ‘good enough’ means both of these words, precisely: good must be good and enough must be enough. If it is objected that delivery of such a ship at such a price is not possible, then the reply to the naval planners, designers and constructors must be to return to the drawing board and make it so.

In fact, designs for suitable ships, and builders for them, are immediately available on the world market if UK shipbuilders are unable to meet this challenge. At about a quarter the cost

of a Type 45, the Danish *Absalon*-class Stanflex design, for example, is a 6,000-ton frigate that is world-leading in its utilisation of modularity and role-adaptation, and which uniquely has amphibious warfare potentiality. It has much to recommend it for many C2 purposes. So, too, in a mixed force, would be an upgraded version of the new Royal Netherlands Navy *Holland* class of ocean-going offshore patrol vessel which, at 3,000 tons, is larger than a Second World War destroyer. However, one would expect UK builders to relish the chance to maintain a viable building programme, which would also allow a slight slippage in the Type 26 – perhaps a welcome, if small, financial alleviation. We envisage an eventual force of perhaps twelve to fourteen Type 45s and Type 26s, and a *minimum* force of twelve to fifteen C2s. In 2007, we signalled a case for thirty first- and second-raters combined; but, since then, recognition of the dire state of the public finances has made this unlikely, short of surge building for war. So we envisage an initial fleet total of about twenty-five surface combatants. That is the number the 2004 ‘re-balancing’ demanded and is, in our judgment, the bare minimum needed for credible conventional deterrence.

This would, of course, represent a significant shift in the navy’s current view of itself and its structure. It optimises the surface force for the enduring and lower-intensity daily constabulary and diplomatic tasks, with some higher capability on top of this force. But, as the Australian triangle in Diagram 1 graphically illustrates, the three sides support each other. As Frederick the Great observed, ‘diplomacy without force is like music without instruments’. He knew much about all three elements of his constructed analogy – diplomacy, force and music. If one side of the triangle is missing or inadequate, the geometry is distorted, or even collapses. The greater ability to be present in adequate numbers and capability in troublesome areas makes the outbreak of major war less likely. We have to carry out

the logically prior task of deterrence, since no reasonable person would or should contemplate a major war with equanimity. Therefore, the good is not the enemy of the best, but its friend. However, under the defective logic of the lesser included case, the best is indeed the enemy of the good.

The greater ability to be present in adequate numbers and capability makes the outbreak of war less likely

The seventeenth, eighteenth and twentieth centuries all descended into protracted episodes of major war as a result of decisions taken during their first decades. The *Pax Britannica* of the nineteenth century (also a product of victories and decisions of its first and second decades, notably by Nelson, Wellington and Castlereagh) was built upon the silent deterrent presence of the ‘constabulary’ Royal Navy, as well as of constant colonial soldiering. For deterrence, for power projection, or as a basis for surge construction in the event of another major war, a restored and adequately sized Royal Navy is indispensable for British national security. ■

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Notes

- 1 Jeremy Blackham and Gwyn Prins, 'The Royal Navy at the Brink', *RUSI Journal* (Vol. 152, No. 2, April 2007), pp. 10–16.
- 2 Bernard Gray, 'Review of Acquisition for the Secretary of State for Defence', 2009, p. 16.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 136.
- 4 Gwyn Prins and Robert Salisbury, 'Risk, Threat and Security: The Case of the United Kingdom', *RUSI Journal* (Vol. 153, No. 1, February 2008), pp. 22–27. The most recent MoD assessment published in the DCDC Strategic Trends Programme on the Future Character of Conflict (February 2010) begins to explore this territory in an obscure but thought-provoking observation buried within its penultimate paragraph (¶43). Here it states that the future character of conflict (we would rather say the future risk environment) 'will result in what some have called wicked, unbounded or insoluble problems. Attempts to solve these using a single institutional framework designed for tame, bounded and soluble problems are almost bound to fail. In wicked problems there is no clear relationship between cause and effect' (p. 38). All this is true and applies to the sources of risk more than to the experience of conflict, in our view, which is why we find the phrasing obscure. But the main framing of the paper is still at variance. Its primary assertion remains that the strategic context will be set by 'threat drivers' which are specified (pp. 4–5 and Annex A). The inconsistencies between ¶43 and what goes before still remain to be explored. But we are encouraged by what we believe to be one of the first acknowledgements of 'wickedness' in doctrinal writing.
- 5 Royal Australian Navy, 'Australian Maritime Doctrine: RAN Doctrine 1', Sea Power Centre, 2010, p. 26.
- 6 The Church of England's Archbishops' Council, 'Submission to the Ministry of Defence's Green Paper, "Adaptability and Partnership: Issues for the Strategic Defence Review"', March 2010.
- 7 William Hague, 'Britain's foreign policy in a networked world', speech at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, 1 July 2010.
- 8 'Then what can I do for you, all you Big Steamers, Oh, what can I do for your comfort and good?' 'Send out your big warships to watch your big waters, That no one may stop us from bringing you food.'
- 9 Admiral Sureesh Mehta, speech at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 21 June 2007. We are indebted to Commodore Ranjit Rai of The Indian Maritime Foundation for a detailed inventory of Indian Navy current and projected construction.
- 10 Andrew Davies, 'The Australian White Paper and Implications', speech given at the RUSI Maritime Operations Conference, 7 July 2010.
- 11 *Naval Spyglass* (Vol. 6, 8 May 2010), p. 18; *UPI*, 'Japan plans to establish a \$40 million strategic naval base in the Horn of Africa state of Djibouti, where U.S. and French forces are deployed to combat al-Qaida jihadists', 11 May 2010; Statement by Parliamentary Vice-Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura on the occasion of the ministerial meeting of the UN Security Council on the issue of piracy off the coast of Somalia, 16 December 2008; and exchange of notes between Japanese and Djiboutian authorities.
- 12 We are indebted to the Chamber of Shipping for the figures relating to Britain merchant shipping trade.
- 13 *Economist*, 'War in the Fifth Domain: Special Briefing on Cyberwar', 3 July 2010, pp. 25–26.
- 14 Although we should note that the excess of £35 billion over ten years represents 0.5 per cent annually of public expenditure, and only 1.5 per cent of the biggest departmental budget (social security and welfare), which is already more than six times the size of the defence budget. One notes, of course, the appropriation of the security concept into this quite different area, and with it a subliminal claim to benefit from the 'trumping' power of the night-watchman's status in funding priority.
- 15 Royal Australian Navy, *op. cit.*, p. 100, Fig. 10.1. This diagram was first used by the Australian Navy in 2000 and has been further refined since then. It arose from original thinking by Professor Ken Booth, amplified further with contributions from Professor Eric Grove, which are duly acknowledged.

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