

**COUNCIL OF MILITARY EDUCATION COMMITTEES  
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM UNIVERSITIES**



## **BRITAIN'S MARITIME FUTURE**

**By Jeremy Blackham and Andrew Lambert**

**COMEC OCCASIONAL PAPER. No 6.**



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**Series Editor**

Dr Patrick Mileham

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**FOREWORD BY  
PROFESSOR DICK CLEMENTS  
CHAIRMAN COMEC**

*It gives me particular pleasure to introduce this COMEC Occasional Paper. Within its covers are two papers delivered by our invited speakers at the 2015 COMEC Defence Conference addressing “Britain’s Maritime Future”.*

*Professor Andrew Lambert is a well-known naval historian. He addresses the future on the basis of a supreme understanding of the past, making a clear distinction between a seapower and a maritime power and drawing out these strands to inform and illuminate future choices to be made by those who determine Britain’s defence policies.*

*Vice Admiral Sir Jeremy Blackham is a distinguished former Assistant Chief of Naval Staff and Deputy Commander-in-Chief Fleet who, in retirement, has served as editor of the influential Naval Review. In his discussion of the options for the future shape of the Royal Navy he argues that, if Her Majesty’s Government wishes the UK to continue something similar to its recent role in world affairs, these options are rather limited: the desired roles determine the necessary shape of the fleet. The question is ultimately whether or not the nation wishes to provide the necessary resources for those roles.*

*Together these two papers constitute a thought provoking contribution to the aftermath of the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review and the determination of Britain’s Maritime Future.*

*Dick Clements*  
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# MARITIME POWER: THE FUTURE

By

Andrew Lambert

## Definitions

I would like to begin by offering a definition of Maritime Power as the measure of the total national engagement with the sea, and the capacity to operate there. It includes the value of maritime trade, as a percentage of national economic output, resource dependence on overseas supply, total manpower engaged in shipping, offshore economic interests, oil and gas, fishing, and wind farms, shipyards, docks, ports, along with all other sea-related economic activity ashore. This may be reflected in the level of naval and maritime security capability - but the connection is variable. Maritime power is not capable of accurate calculation, because it includes such intangibles as culture, identity, and mythology. It is not primarily a military calculation.

In large part this fluidity reflects the reality that the ability to use the oceans freely for commercial purposes has not been in doubt since 1945, with a few notable exceptions. Under current conditions maritime states do not exercise control of the oceans by force, even if the critical shipping routes on which they depend for food, fuel and raw materials are effectively unguarded. Most states rely on a combination of international law, shared interest and the back up offered by limited naval forces, to ensure their shipping moves safely, without hindrance from other nations, or non-state actors. Most surface naval patrolling is concerned with terrestrial diplomatic issues, or countering illegal activity at sea, from piracy to narcotics and people smuggling, being economic crimes which exploit globalisation, not challenge it.

Maritime power has always been intimately connected to the vitality of international trade, today's global economy. Sea trade makes controlling maritime communications a prize worth fighting for, and economic warfare, in one form or another, has been both the main strategic tool of seapowers since antiquity, and a major reason why medium sized powers would choose to adopt that identity. The link between maritime trade, capital formation and modern western democratic tax-raising bureaucratic powers does not need to be re-stated.<sup>1</sup> Nor, I suspect,



does the role of maritime actors, states and non-state actors, in creating an ever wider globalised economy, linked by advanced communications, and secure, legally enforceable means of exchange.

## **Being a Seapower**

States that chose to pursue a sea-centred approach, to trade, security and above all identity, are seapowers. This is entirely different to the use of sea power as strategy - as I shall explain. The relatively small, weak states that elect to become seapowers rely on external resources, food, raw materials, funds and fuel to sustain their economies. There are few modern seapowers, and while none are superpowers, they are significant. They include Japan, South Korea, the Netherlands, Denmark and Britain, states disproportionately engaged in international oceanic trade, and related activities. Maritime identities occupy prominent places in their culture, and they will be the first to respond when the peaceful use of the great common is threatened.

States in which maritime power is a core national focus are thus classically defined as seapowers, a term that goes back to the ancient Greek *Thalassokratia*. A seapower is a state which has made a conscious choice to create and sustain a fundamental engagement between nation and ocean, something which manifests itself across the entire spectrum of national life. Democratic Athens made this choice in the mid 480s BC, before the battle of Salamis. England, and specifically not Britain, made the transition in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the process was complete before the 1707 Act of Union. Seapowers may possess powerful navies, but naval power is not a critical indicator. Denmark is a seapower; Russia is not.<sup>2</sup>

Modern seapowers share much with the Athenians: democracy, the rule of law, free market economies propelled by overseas trade, cultural identities suffused with salt water, from literature and art to national heroes and monuments, oceanic capital cities and an overriding curiosity, a willingness to travel, to learn, and to exchange ideas. They are open societies. We are fortunate to live in one, and need to recognise what it is we share with other seapowers, past, present and future, the better to recognise what separates us from mere naval powers. While almost all states with a coast have some degree of maritime power, very few are seapowers.



The distinction between seapowers and naval powers is critical – and I invite you to consider the significance it may have for the future. Both seapowers and naval powers seek to control the sea, but only seapowers do so from necessity. Sea control is the ability to use the sea for economic and military purposes, while denying that access to our enemies, whether in war or commercial competition.

The strategic core of maritime power has changed very little since Thucydides wrote in the 4th century BC. The core missions remain the same: diplomacy, deterrence, war-fighting and constabulary missions, delivered by naval combat, economic blockade and the projection of power from the sea.<sup>3</sup> Only the tools have changed. In the past decade both the USA and Japan had adopted what might appear to be a new mission, anti-ballistic missile defence, using a long range version of the Standard anti-aircraft missile. The deployment of missile destroyers to counter the threat of missile attack from North Korea is now the primary surface commitment of the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF), and makes it popular with voters. However, this is only a technological variant on the age old naval mission of home defence.

Land power is different. Large continental states tend to be almost or entirely sustained by internal resources, their autarkic agendas and command economies are designed to serve internal purposes, they show limited interest in international exchange.

In marked contrast to the ebb and flow of warfare on land, where possession of territory has been at stake in a series of conflicts stretching back to the end of the Cold War, there has been no significant armed conflict over sea control since 1945. Sea control has been exercised by western liberal states, singly or jointly, since the sixteenth century, a process driven by mutual economic interest. This situation is unlikely to change, and it matters because the real issue for maritime power is the balance that exists between it and alternative forms of power - usually terrestrial - deployed by states and non-state actors that oppose the open, liberal, democratic world of ideas and exchange which maritime power has created.

## Protecting World Trade

While North Korea, Al-Qaeda and IS may share a profound aversion to the liberal-democratic world order and the global maritime economy that sustains it, they lack the capacity to make an effective challenge at sea. In their efforts to disrupt the economic and cultural basis of western capitalism it was no accident that Al-Qaeda attacked the World Trade Centre. World trade is the vector for ideologies of democracy, personal liberty, political accountability, the rule of law, and freedom of choice that these states and organisations abhor. That said terrorism at sea is relatively rare. The suicide attack on the 300,000 Deadweight Tonnage (DWT) oil tanker MV *Limburg* on October 2nd 2002 is now a distant memory, the ship has been repaired and renamed *Maritime Jewel*.

Osama bin Laden issued a statement after the Limburg attack:

‘By exploding the oil tanker in Yemen, the holy warriors hit the umbilical cord and lifeline of the crusader community, reminding the enemy of the heavy cost of blood and the gravity of losses they will pay as a price for their continued aggression on our community and looting of our wealth.’<sup>4</sup>

Stripped of the Islamist rhetoric the key words are ‘lifeline’ and ‘looting’. In Bin Laden’s mind Western dependence on Arabian oil brought the ‘crusaders’ to his Holy Land, so cutting the trade link would increase the chances of them leaving. The lack of any significant follow on suggests the attacks on land targets are far easier to arrange, and far more likely to attract media attention. IS, the new poster boys of radical Islamism, prefer pumping oil to fund their ‘state’. The Tamil Tigers were unique in creating and operating a local navy. Their model has not been replicated.

Terrorism is one of many issues that may manifest themselves at sea, but have their roots and their solutions ashore. Maritime power can limit the impact of these phenomena, but it cannot stop them. Ultimately, what happens at sea is of secondary concern to the great majority of people. This sums up the limits of sea power strategy, and contextualises the response that it has elicited from continental states, and radical non-state actors.

While the liberal democratic capitalist system is absolutely dominant on the ocean, the limits of Maritime Power are very real. Not only are many of the issues which face maritime powers incapable of sea based solutions, but maintaining ocean security in the long term requires costly naval forces. These costs are hard to justify in the absence of a major threat. Most western navies have seen hull numbers fall steeply since 1989. Currently there are too few platforms available to respond to any significant challenge to western sea control, and this trend shows no sign of being reversed. Historically speaking current naval budgets are very low, and they have been falling in key maritime states since the end of the Cold War. Indeed the NATO 2% of GDP defence spend commitment is a very low benchmark.

The challenge of maintaining Maritime power emphasises differences within the western liberal collective. This broad definition includes all liberal democratic trading nations from the USA to Japan. However, within that group some states are seapowers, states with the sea the heart of their identity, most are continental or mixed powers. This distinction will affect how individual states in the collective develop their navies. Navies express the cultural variety of states to a far greater extent than land or air forces. In comparison the variation between individual national land and air forces is relatively small, because they have all been tasked with the same core territorial missions, to maintain national security and support of the civilian power. Seapowers would be expected to put more land and air effort into maritime assets, Marines and Maritime Patrol aircraft for example: but the current lack of United Kingdom Long Range Maritime Patrol aircraft demonstrates that even major maritime states face significant structural problems when it comes to providing critical assets.

My purpose here is to emphasise that individual national navies have distinctive characters. As armed forces they have characters shaped by the nature of the state that they serve. The modern Royal Navy and the United States Navy offer a useful comparison: both operate a wide range of naval missions, from deterrent submarines to amphibious forces, and do so to a very high standard, but their relationship with the wider maritime context is distinctly different. The USN is not the senior service, and it has a distinct 'military' character. It does not see the defence of floating trade as a core mission, while the exercise of constabulary tasks has been separated out to a large and powerful Coast Guard. In essence they have separated their core war-

fighting concerns from the non-military roles which most other navies conduct. In the First Gulf War the US Coast Guard was heavily involved in administering the economic sanctions applied to the Iraqi regime, because its personnel had the necessary legal expertise.<sup>5</sup> It is highly significant that the USN did not. A similar situation applies in the Caribbean, when the Coast Guard leads on prosecuting narcotics smugglers. Other navies have this expertise within their naval officer corps, and do not have ocean-going Coast Guard support. These legal and constabulary roles will be important when countering Chinese challenges to ocean access.<sup>6</sup>

By contrast the Royal Navy, a seapower service, is intimately concerned with the defence of trade, and has been ever since the 1690s. Both the National Debt and the Bank of England were created to sustain the Fleet at a level that it could protect trade and defeat the ideological threat posed by Bourbon absolutism. The relationship with the City of London remains vital, because Britain depends on global commerce, largely by sea, and the City services all aspects of that commerce.

Seapowers emphasise the ability to use the sea for strategic as well as commercial purposes, continental powers have consistently tried to limit the impact of the sea on their terrestrial interests, by force, law and custom. Failure to comprehend this central reality has caused much misunderstanding for those who seek parallels between sea power and land power. The two concepts are fundamentally different in origin, purpose and method. Land power can secure total victory through 'decisive' battle and the occupation of core territory, sea power is restricted to limited outcomes, achieved by economic exhaustion. Sea power is about controlling commerce, not the empty glory of naval battle. It operates in the margins between great powers.

### **Contemporary Threats to Maritime Power**

The greatest threats faced by maritime power are a consequence of the creeping continentalisation of maritime space, restricting the right to use the sea, in favour of advancing the interests of littoral states. These advances combine military and legal developments, driven by states that fear the cultural challenge of Maritime Power. Ever more sophisticated land based weapon systems have enhanced the strategic depth of continental defences, many of them, like the latest Chinese missiles, are

legacies of Soviet Cold War concepts and technologies. Space based sensors have ended the ability of fleets to hide in the mid ocean, and what can be seen can be targeted.

The debate between those who favour free seas and those who seek to extend control lies at the heart of the seapower/land power relationship. In the 17th century Dutch jurist Cornelius van Bynkershoek argued that all waters beyond national boundaries were international: free to all nations, and not belonging to any. This is the famous *mare liberum* (free seas) argument promulgated by another Dutch jurist, Hugo Grotius. In that era national rights at sea were limited to three nautical miles, or within cannon shot. Opponents of seapower claimed total control over entire oceans, but it was not until the early 20th century that nations began to extend sustainable national claims over mineral resources, fish stocks, and more recently to enforce pollution control. A League of Nations conference at The Hague in 1930 failed to resolve these issues, but in 1945 the United States, at the apogee of its power, extended the customary international law principle of a nation's right to protect its natural resources, to include the economic resources of the continental shelf. This launched a long running process in which individual states re-defined their maritime claims, before a general extension of territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) was agreed in the United Nations Convention on the Law Of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982, which provides a legal framework to challenge the age-old right of innocent passage by shrinking the 'high seas'. UNCLOS has been widely adopted, although the USA refused to sign, but it has adopted all but the deep ocean mineral clauses as customary international law. The 200 mile territorial limit and EEZ is now almost universal.

Attempts to restrict the rights of seapowers to use the seas for innocent passage, commerce or economic warfare have a long history. China has consistently used false and ambiguous legal claims as a strategic tool, and it is vital that this strategy be countered.<sup>7</sup> In the past the main sea-based threats were the bombardment of coastal cities and economic blockade. Today air attack from the sea has replaced the cannon, and its legality is not contested, even by the Chinese, whose defence planning is dominated by the naval air threat. Maritime economic sanctions will remain, because western liberal states recognize them as an ideal non-lethal diplomatic/strategic asset of real power. How powerful? Ask the Russians. It is likely the 'west' would block any continentalising moves in this area.

China is attempting to exploit the UNCLOS framework, although not the actual clauses, to extend its territorial claims, seizing islands and shoals from weaker neighbours, and even manufacturing artificial islands to extend littoral claims, and strategic defences against air attack. These 'islands' are specifically denied legal recognition under UNCLOS. The new national area will be defended by land based defence systems – what the United States' Navy terms an anti area access denial strategy.<sup>8</sup> Despite the alarming terminology A2/AD is merely a modern version of the age old strategy employed by nervous land powers which have no ambition to go to sea, in the past represented by the sea fort and the underwater mine. Other modern proponents of such thinking include the Soviet Union/Russia, from whence most of China's ideas and technology have sprung, and North Korea. The self-styled 'Great Wall at Sea' is a resonant soubriquet for the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN): it is meant to be a barrier, not a highway. The Chinese threat to fire ballistic missiles, which may have nuclear warheads, against American Carrier Battle Groups is diplomatically absurd. Launching even a single such ballistic weapon would trigger a very different kind of conflict.

In reality China, for all this posturing in Beijing, lacks the capability to operate beyond the First Island Chain, Taiwan, Japan and their outlying islands. It cannot challenge western sea control – even with artificial islands.

The inevitable consequence of Chinese ambition is that the United States Navy is now very welcome in naval bases long ago surrendered to nationalist governments, including Subic Bay in the Philippines, and Camranh Bay in Vietnam. Japan has provided the Philippine Navy with new ships which greatly increase its patrol capabilities. Chinese domestic rhetoric has been stoking up nationalism; it may prove harder to control the process now the economy has faltered.

Maritime Power is not what it used to be, because it has not been contested for seventy years. Classic studies focused on naval command of the sea, secured in great battles, Salamis, Lepanto, the Armada, Trafalgar, Jutland and Midway, which served as a useful short-hand for the acquisition or maintenance of sea control. Great naval battles did not decide wars; they enabled one side to exploit sea control to further their wider strategic objects. Seapowers imposed economic blockades as a strategy to weaken their land-bound opponents, but needed military allies to

defeat great continental states. For example the last three 'great' wars, 1793-1815, 1914-18 and 1939-45 all ended in the military defeat of continental aggressors, heavily influenced by economic ruin.

There will be no battles like Salamis or Trafalgar in the foreseeable future, or any serious contest for maritime power; sea control has been in the hands of an evolving western liberal consortium for centuries. That consortium is currently led by the United States. Any challenge to that western liberal sea control by the Soviet Union, or latterly the People's Republic of China, has existed in the minds of alarmists who confuse numbers with capability, boasting with delivery, and fear with ambition.

The Soviet fleet was never intended to do anything more than defend the coasts of the Russian Empire, for such it was, from western sea based attacks, by amphibious forces, carrier aviation, and by the 1960s Polaris missiles. The great warships of the Soviet fleet were nuclear armed and powered anti-submarine cruisers, cruise missile submarines designed to sink American carriers, and a submarine based nuclear second strike capability. These were purely defensive functions. There were no plans for a strategic attack on oceanic shipping, and no capacity. After 1989 the Soviet fleet collapsed, because it was not important to the survival of Russia. Any naval resurgence exists in the mind of the St. Petersburg born President, who thinks like the city's founder, but lacks his resources. In truth the Russian Navy is the only truly circular phenomenon in history, an endless cycle of creation, defeat, disintegration, and re-creation. At no time has it been vital to the security of Russia. Russia never intended to challenge Western seapower when it was powerful and it is highly unlikely to do so now.

Russia will not be a challenge to western seapower any time soon, the only Soviet shipyard that could build aircraft carriers. Nicolaiev, now Mykolaiv, is in the Ukraine, along with the factory that built Soviet marine gas turbines. Nuclear submarines have been delivered, but they are decades late, and the embarked 'Bulava' ballistic missile system has serious problems. In keeping with the nationalist mood of the current Russian regime the submarines are named after ancient Russian heroes.<sup>9</sup> The fate of the French built helicopter carriers, *Sevastopol* and *Vladivostock*, detained in France as a sanction for the illegal war in the Ukraine, is emblematic. Russia named



a ship after a foreign city, which it then seized. Putin's action recovered Sevastopol, a potent nationalist symbol of military heroism, but it has also seriously damaged the prospects of a Russian naval renaissance actually using the historic naval base. This is hardly surprising if we accept that Russia has never been a seapower.

Not that the United States has met that description for the past two centuries either. The United States is not a seapower because, like Russia and China, it is far too big, and far too powerful to rely on such limited tools, or so eccentric an identity. In 1782 the United States was a seapower, operating in the Atlantic economy, from port cities on the Eastern seaboard. As it expanded it acquired a continental ideology, from the Republican Party of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, one that despised commerce and merchants. Later it acquired continental scale, through purchase and military conquest. Continent sized states necessarily operate in ways that reflect their resources. They move their capital cities away from the sea, and prioritise land and air armaments. The point was demonstrated in 1947. Having built the most powerful navy of all time, and used it to crush Japan, the United States rapidly demobilised, abandoning the sea. In 1947 the Truman Administration turned the Army Air Force into an independent Air Force, with nuclear weapons. In the same year it created a Department of Defence that cancelled the new aircraft carrier programme, and planned to strip Navy of the Marine Corps and strategic aviation. The United States Navy would have been reduced to a transport service for the Army and Air Force, reflecting the reality of American power.<sup>10</sup> In the event Kim Il Sung saved the USN, reminding American leaders how important the flexibility of seapower could be, and how effective carrier aviation and amphibious assault could be in any conflict short of nuclear exchange.

After 1989 the United States' Navy, now the only superpower fleet and well aware of what had happened in 1947, needed a new 'threat' to avoid deep defence cuts.<sup>11</sup> That need met the rising ambition of the Peoples Republic of China to take to the international stage, manifest in a growing fleet, one that looked strikingly similar to the now departed Soviet force, both technically and intellectually. Like Russia, this last is the key China had and has; no ambition to contest sea control beyond its own rather generously defined littoral. China is not, and never has been a seapower. It will never become one, as long as it retains its current scale and location. It is a vast land empire, containing many subject peoples, in which the key to the Mandate of Heaven is to feed the peasants and maintain domestic order. The

sea is so unimportant, or so dangerous, as I will explain later, that China does not have a Navy. Instead there are three separate forces, revealingly described as the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), which operate independently of one another. This method of enhancing central control was employed by the Qing Empire in the 1880s and 1890s – with catastrophic consequences for naval effectiveness.

Totalitarian states fear seapower, not the limited strategic impact of naval forces, but as a vector for the cornucopia of liberal democratic ideas which underpin seapower states. These dangers were cogently expressed by Plato, and Confucius; the sea was the corrupting medium across which unwelcome ideas flowed. Plato demanded that cities be moved 8 miles inland, to save the citizens from this malaise. In 150 BC Rome demanded that Carthage be demolished and rebuilt 8 miles inland, as the price of peace. The Romans had no reason to fear Carthaginian armed might; Carthage had no ships, and no soldiers. They were terrified of levelling democracy, spread by sea. Rome deliberately destroyed Carthage, and removed it from history: Napoleon consciously attempted to do the same to Britain. Today the dangerous ideas behind maritime power are more easily spread by the internet, the latest in a long line of advanced communication systems pioneered by maritime powers. The Chinese Government's response, censorship and control, illustrates what it fears, and why it will never be a seapower. In July 2013 President Xi Jinping spoke of 'strategically managing' the sea, in order to become a 'maritime power.' Much of the debate remains focused on the South China Sea, gaining international respect, and extending territorial control.<sup>12</sup> The last two issues are mutually incompatible. Seizing territory from other nations by force and in clear violation of International Law are not conducive to gaining respect.

The startling fall in prices on the Shanghai stock market in August 2015 reinforces the point. China is a command economy, centrally directed by a One Party State. This structure is wholly incompatible with a genuine capital market, a classic seapower system that can only function effectively under the rule of law and with democratic accountability. The Shanghai stock market was either an act of criminal folly, or a fraud designed to suck in the wealth of the newly prosperous middle classes, and ruin them before they began agitating for political change. The consequent economic downturn will have serious consequences, not least for any future development of the PLAN.

Despite the alarmist rhetoric of some American commentators the PLAN is not a threat to Western/American sea control. The ships are numerous but not advanced, the 'flagship' aircraft carrier is in fact the last Soviet carrier, a second-hand forty year old platform, laid down in the Ukraine at the height of the Cold War. The idea that it is in any way comparable with American nuclear powered carriers is absurd. Even the much vaunted first flight from the carrier was a photo-shop exercise. Some progress has been made since.<sup>13</sup> The Russians who operate its sister ship, the *Admiral Kuznetsov*, require far more power to get the same aeroplanes off the deck. It may be indicative that the carrier project leader died of heart failure the day after the first 'launch'.

The issue of a seapower identity has profound implications. When continental powers suffer military defeat or economic collapse they invariably cut their navies before their armies, or air forces. China will not buck this trend. The only questions are how bad the economic down turn will be, and how much internal unrest will follow. China can live without a Navy, but not without an Army.

In reality the Chinese threat to seapower is existential: it wants to render the sea irrelevant to its security needs, not to acquire control over the oceans. The object is to conquer the sea on the land. The Romans wiped out every other navy in the Mediterranean, by conquering and incorporating the countries that owned them into their empire. The current Chinese island chain programme is turning offshore reefs and shoals, over which it has no legitimate claim under existing international law, into airstrips, in order to push forward land based defence systems. They seek to exclude naval power from the area in which their ballistic missile submarines are stationed, and from which carrier aviation could be used to strike their coastal defences. The synergy with Soviet thinking is obvious.

These observations are not, I hasten to add, a criticism of Chinese, Russian or American decision-making. These vast states cannot become seapowers; they necessarily prioritise the land. Any criticism is directed at those who attempt to create the illusion that such states could ever be seapowers. In Beijing a couple of years ago an eminent Chinese academic asked me when China could become the next great seapower. I reminded him that his model of a 'seapower' was the United States, the naval hegemon of era, and that China might take over this position, at vast expense, in fifty years, but it would never be a seapower like Athens, Carthage,

Venice, the Dutch Republic and Britain, sea empires of communications, commerce and constitutions.

Seapowers matter because they take a long, maritime, view of their security needs. While the connection between overseas trade, resource dependency and naval budgets used to be synergistic, the modern world has tended to take the free use of the seas for granted. The convulsions caused by Somali piracy were only a shock to those who thought the past had no bearing on the present. History shows that piracy is an economic fact of life, one where opportunity meets ability, unguarded spaces, rich pickings and maritime skills. The answer is always the same, control of shipping, convoy and other security measures, and critically the restoration of political authority on land. It worked in the Caribbean in the 18th century, and off the Horn of Africa in the 21st. All that is required is the political will to tackle the problem, by providing the means, and defining the mission. To emphasise my point about the United States and seapower, the USN spent most of its time off Somalia conducting drone missions against Al Shabab terrorists ashore. Elsewhere piracy flourishes in the absence of security. Oil smuggling on the West African coast has a far bigger impact on the global economy than Somali activity, but no-one has been prepared to grasp the issue. Piracy is not terrorism. Pirates are rational economic actors; they have no desire for martyrdom. The one undisputed example of maritime economic terrorism, the Al-Queda attack on the MV *Limburg* happened a long time ago. With the sea so far out of mind in maritime states, it is unlikely such ill-equipped continental opponents of seapower culture will commit their resources to this area.

Piracy sits alongside drugs, arms and people smuggling, all illegal activities that prey on the state system, rather than seek to overthrow it. The problems facing seapower are illustrated by the current refugee/migrant crisis in the Mediterranean. The political leadership across Europe has failed to agree on policy, leaving defence and constabulary forces with no clear mission. European navies have the capability to control the sea passages being used, as they did those off Somalia, but they cannot be tasked until there is consensus on what that control is to be used for.

The 2007-08 economic down turn had a significant impact on seapower. By their nature seapowers were heavily exposed to global events, and many economised, allowing their operational fleets to shrink, the average age of fleets to increase, and

operational cycles decrease. Capability gaps were accepted to save costs – notably British carrier aviation and Long range Maritime Patrol aviation. China seemed to be unaffected.

In the longer term the events of the past decade suggest the underlying economic realities are shifting. Demand for raw materials, and the requisite oceanic shipping, is falling. Maersk has cut sailings on the Europe-Asia route. Manufacturing jobs that were outsourced to China and other Asian countries are beginning to trickle back to Europe and North America, as local wage rates rise, and the inflexibilities of a globalised process hamper response times. The dramatic collapse of fuel costs in 2014-15 may slow the decline of shipping, but in the longer term these trends seem to be irresistible, not least on ecological grounds.

Where China and Russia are masquerading as seapowers, Japan and India are developing real capability. The Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force is the most powerful non-nuclear navy, with outstanding submarine, air warfare and anti-submarine assets, using many of the latest American systems, and it maintains very high levels of combat capability, limited only by the Constitution. It has a base at Djibouti, and vital interests in the safe movement of ocean shipping. India has a different trajectory, acquiring indigenous and ex Soviet assets, using Russian and western weapons and sensors. Progress is slow, but the scale of India's commitment is impressive. It is the regional power in the Indian Ocean, and has political and economic systems that are close to the seapower model, unlike those of China and Russia.

### **China : The Maritime Consequences of Economic Failure**

The current crisis in China is exemplary. The Chinese state has, for domestic political reasons of legitimacy, created a high growth economy based on manufacturing exports. The intention has been to keep the population happy through rising living standards, based on new factory jobs, while avoiding the need to revisit the one-party state. The approach of 18th century Imperial governments, equally focussed on internal stability, was far wiser. They retained the centuries old East Asian isolationist agenda, restricting trade to one port, Guangzhou (then Canton), which was as far from Beijing as possible, stopped all contact between westerners and

the local populace, and were ready to stop trade completely to maintain internal order. Today the Chinese Government desperately tries to control the internet, but the decades of export led growth, fuelled by massive state borrowing have ended. Growth was the key to keeping the masses employed, and political dissent under control. Rising wages and structural inefficiency have reduced China's competitive edge on labour costs, and the state has not generated enough high value manufacturing to compensate.

Without the dynamic of a free market Chinese industry remains unresponsive, outmoded and corrupt.<sup>14</sup> States have never been the best managers of economic activity. Exports are down over 8% year on year as of this July 2015. The associated housing boom has added further mountains of debt that cannot be repaid. Labour disputes are rising, and there is no democratic outlet for popular discontent. The problem for the Chinese leadership is that only a liberalised market, which is upheld by the rule of law and democratic accountability, can generate the type of funding that China needs, but that would be incompatible with the existing political structure. As Mikhail Gorbachev discovered, once the door is opened it cannot be shut, and the one party state is among the first casualties. While China currently holds massive foreign currency reserves, even these are finite. In sum the 'Western' liberal capitalist economic model, created by seapowers, and sustained by a wider maritime power consensus has once again outlasted the Continental totalitarian alternative.

The Chinese crisis is more existential than economic. It reveals that at heart China is what it has always been, a vast Empire dominated by domestic concerns, it has never been a seapower, and maritime economic activity has always been a marginal concern. The problem it faces is strikingly similar to that of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, it cannot carry on as it is, and cannot change without risking the entire imperial structure. Both economic failure and democratic reform risk breaking up the monolith. The maritime challenge facing China today is, as it always has been, cultural and not strategic.

The PLAN may be among the first casualties of the crisis. It only ever existed to support the internal political agenda. The alternative, that China seeks an external

crisis to distract attention from domestic issues is unlikely, as a nuclear superpower it could not afford the risk of having its militaristic posturing taken seriously.

China matters because its sustained high levels of growth have fuelled the growth of world trade, and the shipping services which it relies on. The Chinese stock market crash and the devaluation of the renminbi, both of which escaped the control of a totalitarian Government, will impact on global economic growth. This year trade in goods has fallen, especially in the emerging economies. This is contributing to what has been a prolonged period of weak growth in world trade in both goods and services. In 2010 growth approached 20% this year it may fall to 1%. The obvious highlights, halving key commodity prices, will reduce trading volumes, and demand for shipping services. It will also impact on domestic growth, which has typically been around half that of world trade. This may be a problem for states which are more heavily leveraged on international/maritime activity.

## **World Trade**

Protectionism is already growing, the Doha round of trade negotiations launched by the World Trade Organisation have been running for 14 years without reaching a conclusion, while regional moves for greater openness have also stalled. In an age of austerity and domestic unemployment there are few votes to be found in trade liberalisation, and even fewer in costly naval programmes.

This is where the politics of seapower states are so important. From the 16th to the 20th centuries the maritime capitalist economies of the Dutch Republic and Britain consistently traded domestic agriculture and industry for ever greater access to overseas markets, because the capitalists had access to the levers of power. The British creation of a Free Trade economy in the 1840s was a spectacular example. It created the modern global economy. In autocratic continental states the 'City' will be outweighed by domestic factors, employment, self-sufficiency and inherent nationalist agendas. It is from Russia and China that we hear talk of war and conquest, an age old element in the 'bread and circuses' of totalitarian politics. Liberal economies do not choose war, because it is bad for international business. The economic sanctions currently in place against Russia as a result of the seizure of the Crimea, and overt support for 'separatists' in the Eastern Ukraine, are



working. With the assistance of the halving of oil prices Russia has been pushed into recession, and is lashing out at world trade, with a series of autarkic measures to ban imported cheese, and other goods. It remains to be seen how long Russia can sustain the damage.

Of the once fabled BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) state economies that would dominate a new world economy Brazil and Russia are already in recession, with rising internal political tensions, China is desperately trying to stave off recession but India, which has a long-established democratic government, a culture open to the world, and the priceless ability to communicate in the language of trade, is still growing. This is not accidental. The other BRICs have been riding world trade for domestic advantage, when pressed they have reverted to autarky and protectionism, India sees a different future. The latest Harley Davidson motorcycle, that most iconic piece of Americana, is made in India. Not assembled, like the 'Chinese' iPhone. The Indian Navy will survive the current economic downturn; those of the other BRICS look far less secure.

With world trade either growing very slowly or stalling, shipping movements declining, and rising regional instability there is the potential for the global economy to fragment, not as a Cold War bipolar model, but a truly kaleidoscopic pattern reminiscent of the pre-modern world, where markets had to be opened by armed force, projected by sea, and secured through relatively high levels of naval activity.

Among other straws in the wind the shale gas revolution has the potential to re-order the global system. In the medium term China is sitting on the world's largest shale gas reserves, and may follow the United States towards autarky, as a strategic opportunity, while exploiting current low international prices. Britain will soon be importing gas from the USA, offering real advantages on price and energy security. Economies that have relied on rising commodity prices, like Australia, will be hit hard. It may be possible to break the dependency on Middle East oil that has tied the world to the region since 1945, transforming regional security from a vital western concern to a matter of marginal interest. The new Suez Canal may be too late.

## The Future of Maritime Power

The future of maritime power depends on the coherence of the western seapower consortium. For as long as the United States is prepared to provide the current high end war fighting capability, based on carrier aviation, Marine Expeditionary forces, and nuclear submarines western sea control is secure. The fact that the United States is not a seapower, and has shown signs of reverting to the isolationism of the 1920s, means this situation should not be taken for granted. However, American superpower status depends on the ability to operate globally, without reliance on host nation support, and here the USN is the key enabler. The current 'Swing to the Pacific' is in reality an asymmetric downsizing exercise, in which more reductions have been made in the Atlantic/European theatre. Pacific forces have also been cut. At present it is unusual for more than two carriers to be operational, a far cry from the seven used in the First Gulf War. Yet more are being built, *Gerald Ford* ready to enter service, the *John F Kennedy* to follow, and then the *Enterprise*. Each of these ships outclasses all the other carriers in the world combined.

It is important that the seapowers in the 'western' Maritime consortium step up their efforts to fill the capability gap left by American reductions. The Libyan campaign of 2011 showed how this will work. Four American Marine Corps Harriers stopped Qaddafi's offensive on the outskirts of Benghazi: the Europeans then took months to finish the job, lacking the carrier strike capacity for the timely, effective interdiction of hostile movements on the ground, and the political co-ordination needed to achieve a quick solution. Coming only months after the premature mothballing of HMS *Ark Royal* and the disposal of the Harrier force, this campaign amply illustrated the penalties of ill-judged capability holidays. While the completion of the new *Queen Elizabeth* class carriers will rectify this problem, the Royal Navy is desperately short of platforms, especially for the extensive range of constabulary function that seapowers must exercise. One carrier cannot be in five places, nor is it an economic asset for most constabulary missions.

Ultimately the future of maritime power will be driven by world trade. Seapowers will continue to build and operate sophisticated navies to protect their vital national interests as part of a western liberal collective; these forces give them the ability to

impose economic sanctions on hostile states. Western maritime powers will also be engaged at sea, protecting world trade, the economic basis of their prosperity.

The enemies of maritime power are undemocratic, abuse the legal process as a tool of state power, have command economies dominated by state policy, and cultural identities shaped by military might, and the domination of conquered peoples. They fear the social, political and economic challenge of western liberal democracy. The oceans have always been the vector for these radical and dangerous ideas, as Plato recognised. Like Plato the modern opponents of liberal ideology seek to limit that threat by restricting the ability of the sea, and the internet, to act as a vector for those ideas. Even if Russia and China build powerful fleets, and that looks less likely now than at any stage since 2000, they will remain mere naval powers, nothing more. Their challenge is unlikely to succeed. Pirates will continue to operate as long as they do not impact on insurance rates, while the terrorists seem to have abandoned the oceans.

The elephant in the room is China. President Xi's 2015 bombastic military parade, redolent of Red Square in the Cold War, and the symbolism of the personality cult, suggests China is in danger of following the Soviet Union into oblivion. If the Chinese economy stalls, and China begins to spend serious money on turning the current 'smoke and mirrors' armed forces - which rely on man power and numbers, not advanced technology - into something equivalent in capability to the United States, it will collapse.

In sum the future of Maritime Power lies with the western liberal nations' maritime powers and democracies. As long as they are prepared to maintain adequate sea control forces and resist creeping continentalisation, they can deal effectively with the challenge of closed societies, command economies and terrorists.

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# FUTURE MARITIME DEFENCE

By

Vice Admiral Sir Jeremy Blackham

## Navies

It is a privilege to follow Professor Lambert with whom I have no real disagreement – even if he has eaten some of my sandwiches. But if something is worth saying, it is worth saying twice. I want to try to answer the question ‘What does all this mean for the sorts of naval forces a nation like Britain should have?’

Of course, it depends above all what you are trying to do and unless and until a defence review fills the yawning national strategy and identity gap in the 2010 SDR we cannot sensibly answer the question. But whilst that may be true it will not do as an answer to today’s immediate question.

Let me start with some general observations about navies, which have always been difficult for governments and defence planners to deal with since they first appeared on the historical scene in the latter part of the second Millennium BCE. Indeed in our first very detailed accounts of naval matters, from Athens in the fifth Century BCE, virtually all the points I am going to make were strongly made then.

1. Navies are very expensive. They require not only ships, but substantial infrastructure, and shore facilities, especially if they operate abroad, with considerable material support, and large and generally highly trained crews.
2. Ships take a long time to build – they represent a long term investment and can be difficult to replace quickly if lost, which may be a tactical consideration. Major change in the shape of a navy can take a long time, unless those changes are simply reductions in the existing shape.
3. Ships have long service lives, so unless you can accommodate and retrofit advancing technology, you are generally stuck for a long time with whatever you have acquired. Both these last two points mean that the Navy we plan today will not fully appear for around 10 years, probably in a very different

world about which we know very little, and may still be around in 30 years' time in a world about which we know nothing. If you doubt that, take yourself back to 1985 and ask how much you could have predicted about the world of 2015.

4. Naval warfare has always been highly technological. Technology advances can make ships obsolete, or at least second rate with plenty of hull life left. Perhaps the most classic example was the introduction of Dreadnoughts in 1906, which rendered existing battleships obsolete. Incorporating new technology has always been difficult and expensive.

5. Since about the third Century BCE, most naval activity has taken place out of sight of the population at large, reducing the general understanding of naval and maritime matters. As an aside, remember that when people don't get a message, it is almost always the fault of the messenger.

6. Naval presence can control and influence trade and potentially hostile activities without engaging in conflict, and can be introduced or withdrawn easily and at short notice. It can have diplomatic and military impacts disproportionate to its strength. Similarly its absence can also have a disproportionate impact. This is the well-known flexibility of maritime forces.

7. The sea is the sea, is the enemy. Its sheer size, its weather and other natural hazards can have dramatic effects on maritime activity. These tend to reduce the natural advantage of the defence and give the attacker an advantage.

8. Finally and rather contemporary - but importantly because it is the underlying *leitmotif* of my remarks - the changing nature of both warfare and the globalised commercial and knowledge economy may mean that conflict is no longer resolved solely by kinetic means. We need to understand that, for example, a cyber-attack, or a trade blockade is no less an act of war because the immediate death toll is very low.

Now, after 2500 years we know a great deal about naval activity and maritime strategy. Indeed one can reasonably say that time has merely confirmed most of the general principles of maritime strategy which Thucydides set out in his great History of the Peloponnesian War. But it has also demonstrated that there are inherent difficulties with naval force construction of which the two most significant are the high cost of navies and the impact of developing technology.

## **The Royal Navy**

Given this, how should the UK set about creating a Navy, from the position we're now in? It's very tempting, and would be much more my inclination, to tear up the template and propose a new look navy. However I fear, for all the reasons I have given, we have to start from where we are and with what we can reasonably expect to do, and be able to change over time, remembering that we can be stuck with the platforms at least for, on current evidence, 30 years or more.

But this is a second order question. Navies have no inherent right to exist. The prior question so often is 'What are we trying to do?' This question is frequently phrased in terms of a 'national grand strategy', itself to be derived from a national grand vision and cascaded down into a defence plan, noting the potential threats. This should produce a set of tasks, a set of capabilities needed which might include naval capabilities and of course a resource bill. If the resources cannot be provided the process must be re-iterated until they can. In the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) the force structure was spelt out but the strategy was not and the resources provided were inadequate for the plan. In other words the proper process was subverted, though it is a challenging process. We can discuss this in the question time, but for now I am going to state it as an assumption that it is very unlikely that any such grand strategy will be adumbrated in SDSR 2015, or for that matter in 2020, so we shall have to do our best without it.

However we have to start from where we are, not only in force structure terms, but in the light of other relevant factors, like the support infrastructure we have or can reasonably expect to create; the defence industry we have or can expect to have access to elsewhere; our technology base; the overall political context say, our position as a P5 country; the benefits and demands of NATO or risks of Scottish independence or the mood of the country on issues; the likely size of the defence budget; the level



of help and co-operation we can reliably expect to receive from allies; and of course the overall global security scene which is certainly as threatening as it has ever been, even if the weapons and nature of war *may* be changing.

This sounds rather complicated and indeed it is. But for better or worse we do already have one or two pegs in the UK naval ground.

## **Nuclear Deterrence**

The first is the nuclear deterrent submarine force and the infrastructure and supporting forces it requires to operate with the necessary security and credibility. Both major political parties are presently committed to its like-for-like replacement although there may be a Scottish or Corbynesque shadow hanging over its future. It is self-evidently a very expensive capability to acquire, support and run effectively, and must be underpinned by an adequate force of nuclear attack submarines to generate the people and skills required to man it. But that is not my theme here. I want to develop another important consideration and to do this we have to dive into nuclear deterrence ‘theology’. But stay with me because there is an important conclusion.

The nuclear deterrent presents us with a potentially dangerous paradox. Its replacement will pose a far more severe technical and industrial challenge to a shrinking UK defence industry than did either Polaris or Trident; and it is difficult to believe that the full costs, infrastructure and timescales have yet been firmly identified let alone budgeted. So the financial and technical risks to the remaining conventional programme seem considerable, notwithstanding the recent 2% of GDP pledge, which anyway may not be quite what it seems. Conventional force levels must be at risk and so therefore is the credibility of the nuclear deterrent. Why?

The highly dangerous, and ultimately incredible, doctrine of ‘Nuclear Tripwire’ which envisaged early and possibly massive use of nuclear weapons in the event of Soviet or other national aggression was abandoned in the 1960’s. The more persuasive, although still dangerous, ‘Flexible Response’ which followed and included a variety of nuclear escalation options, assumed that use of nuclear weapons was a last resort. We signed up to this strategy and its consequences for

defence spending. It has also been UK policy that nuclear weapons would never be used against non-nuclear states party to the Non Proliferation Treaty, although during the Cold War first use was never ruled out. But the nuclear deterrent is not a substitute for conventional capabilities. The credibility of flexible response depends upon deferring any decision to use it until the very existence of the nation is at stake. This requirement means that the conventional forces of first resort must be sufficient to deal with any lesser threat; and one's potential enemy must believe it to be so. The question at issue must be of such severity that the risk of nuclear obliteration is worth accepting. And one's opponent must be absolutely convinced of that too.

If our conventional forces are weak, the point of transition to nuclear use may be lowered to levels where the risk of nuclear obliteration is self-evidently disproportionate to the issue at stake – almost back to tripwire. At that point we don't just lose flexibility; nuclear use becomes incredible and can be so perceived by an opponent – a bluff waiting to be called. Thus through *conventional* weakness, the nuclear deterrent is compromised and arguably incredible. Nuclear deterrence unsupported by an adequate and flexible conventional underpinning does not, indeed cannot, deter conflict. Nuclear deterrence by itself is not strong defence.

The paradox has not been addressed or fully understood, even by many of those who make policy. This kind of strategic ignorance and disinterest seems to have been a hallmark of recent government practice in defence under any party. Serious strategic policy making is trumped by expediency. Budgets trump military credibility; and so we are at risk of being trumped by events. It is no 'policy' to have a nuclear deterrent and then buy whatever else can be afforded, with no informed consideration of how the strategy fits together. This is not to argue that the UK should not possess a nuclear deterrent, but rather that to be effective and credible to friend and foe alike, it must be part of a coherent overall strategy.

### **Future Aircraft Carriers**

This brings me to the second peg in the ground, the new aircraft carriers.

Let me say first that it is important to understand that a carrier by itself has no particular military value. It is just a marine platform. It is what it carries that is

important. A large carrier with a trivial air group may be more of a danger than an asset because it risks self-delusion over what can be done. Nor actually is it clear just why the government sees it as a critical capability; SDSR 2010 said that the UK had a strategic requirement for aircraft carriers, but it did not explain what it was. Without knowing that, it is difficult to determine how crucial it is. Obviously it provides considerable potential against future uncertainties especially overseas, although at significant opportunity cost to other capabilities. But it is a huge national investment and moreover it is a fact which is not now going away, so clearly its potential must be exploited. This surely means purchasing sufficient aircraft of whatever type to allow full exploitation of its aviation capability, although it is to say the least sad and operationally inconvenient that it cannot cross-operate with the US and French carriers. Whether this capability should be a full carrier strike capability or a large amphibious capability, or something else, is more difficult to evaluate without a clear national vision or grand strategy. But we *are* going to have and operate them if we can find the manpower, (not itself a trivial issue), so I see no point in reopening this box. The sense of realism which I shall urge on the Navy later in this address, obliges me to accept this *fait accompli*. However, it is very expensive and, like the nuclear deterrent, will pre-empt a large chunk of the budget with consequences for the rest of the fleet, and very possibly for defence as a whole.

### **Britain's Future Maritime Capability**

This highlights another issue; those two pegs in the ground may distort force structure. Navies can be balanced across a range of capabilities and so be suitable for a wide range of operations in what we used to call high intensity maritime warfare. For the RN, unless the UK abandons her global influence aspirations, this must mean retaining the Amphibious capability, which is one of the few truly world class deployable capabilities we have; operating a submarine force for offensive, defensive and intelligence gathering purposes as well as those related to the deterrent; maintaining a force of surface combatants to provide the necessary escorts for carrier or amphibious operations as well as a range of other tasks to which I shall come later; retaining a mine countermeasures capability although this is very likely to employ the maritime equivalent of drones operating possibly from some sort of 'mother ship'; providing the underway replenishment capability necessary for global deployment; and a range of other smaller tasks. It also means operating at the forward edge of technology, surveillance, information handling and

cyber warfare capability, which is also very expensive, but if you want to engage in this level of activity, ships which cannot compete with its growing challenges have little or no military value.

At the opposite end of the scale, there is of course the entirely rational concept of a much smaller coastal and therefore primarily defensive navy. For a range of practical and political reasons, including those that Professor Lambert gave us, and others which you will easily think of, I do not believe that the UK is likely to consider this option and so I see no point in wasting time on it now.

More interesting is the whole question of what I am going to call the 'Eternal Maritime Verities'. Probably the most enduring, common and necessary function of navies across the centuries has been that which is so well and enduringly captured in the Naval Prayer –

*“To be a safeguard unto our most gracious sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth and a security for such as pass upon the seas on their lawful occasions.”*

The security of the seas, the free passage of peoples and goods, the suppression of piracy and the slave trade, the bringing of humanitarian relief, the evacuation of UK and other citizens from places of danger, the regulation of the exploitation of the resources of the sea and the seabed have all long been key functions of navies. The requirement has grown substantially with the growth of globalisation, itself a maritime phenomenon as much as it is an IT phenomenon. These tasks, all of them the prerogative of maritime forces, are frequently grouped together under the general title of maritime security – an essential feature of a secure and prosperous world - tend to require numbers of hulls for ubiquity, rather than the highest of military capabilities.

Related to this is the issue of conventional deterrence I have already talked about, which may also require numbers of units. However there may be reasonable debate over the level of capability required in this case since the single unit exposed as a signal of deterrence may easily become a hostage to events, unless it has adequate capability to cope with escalation, or other support at reasonable call. In other words, I am claiming that there is an unassailable case for greater numbers of surface combat hulls than the maximum number of 19 which we are currently planning, if our plans are to make sense in the real world.

So, what are we to do about it? Here, we find ourselves bang in the middle of one of the oldest of all the old force structure chestnuts – that of the ‘quality versus quantity’ debate, most frequently expressed by Lanchester’s well known, even notorious, equation or law, which I have here seriously over-simplified as:

$$\text{Capability (C)} = \text{Quality (Q1)} \times \text{Quantity (Q2)}$$

The thinking behind this is obvious enough but over simplistic. First because it is very difficult to assign credible numerical values to any term but Q2, particularly in the era of new ways of warfare. And Q1 may anyway be relative. Secondly because, whilst it appears to show that wherever Q1 or Q2 is very low or zero, then C is either 0 or very low, it doesn’t tell us which is the more powerful term, although Lanchester tackled this in more mathematically complex versions of his equation which I could explain to you if I spoke fluent algebra. What his proposition does make clear is that, if the number of units you have is so few that you have to gap some operational spot, then C in that spot is zero. We can therefore conclude that a low number of units, which can only be in one place at one time, will leave zero capability in other places, and since it is patently obvious that we are, and always have been, very poor at predicting the appearance of threats, we run high risks if our numbers are low. This applies in particular to surface combatants and to MCM forces and might severely limit the number of tasks we can undertake simultaneously, or result in misemploying or wasting ships overmatched or undermatched to their tasks.

I can see only two respectable ways of skinning this cat when the resources allocated to defence fall seriously short of the political aspirations (as now) and when there is no disposition to increase them, and one less respectable avenue which I am afraid is often attempted.

Let me deal first with the dishonest one, since it’s the most commonly used; it is the technique of “double earmarking.” This, putting it crudely, involves creating a force with the capability to do several probable tasks separately, then declaring them to all those tasks without consideration of the likelihood of more than one of them occurring simultaneously. This was very common during the Cold War, and is usually, to speak plainly, cheating, and a route to self-deception. It can work in some limited areas if the real probabilities and risks have been calculated but in general it carries high risk. *I have no doubt that it will be employed in the upcoming defence review and must be scrutinised carefully.*

Of the other two methods, the first is relatively easy but politically embarrassing. It is to revisit one's policy goals and aspirations, reiterate the calculations, and reduce these goals to a level where the necessary force structure can be accommodated within the budget you are prepared to allocate. This is arguably what should have been done in both the SDR of 1998 and in SDSR 2010, but was not. Instead there was an attempt to pretend that the tasks could be met, and to 'fund' the claim with massive but frequently illusory savings from 'efficiencies' in the support and logistics areas.

The second method involves trading-off capability against numbers. That is to say, deliberately to build some ships suitable for high intensity warfare, including probably the escorting of a carrier or amphibious task force, almost certainly in coalition with other allies, who might also provide some of the appropriate capabilities by agreement. It is however worth pointing out that allies do not always support every task you wish to undertake as recent history has demonstrated. The remainder of the high capability vessels would be replaced by smaller vessels (perhaps some improved development of the new River Class currently building) in a ratio of, say 2 or 3 to 1 – what became known in the Naval Staff as the Black Swan proposal. They might have less kinetic weapons but greater cyber capability for example.

Taking current force structures this might allow for 6 Type 45's, 6 or 7 Type 26's and perhaps 15 or so '2nd rate' frigates, or a force of 25-30 mixed surface vessels, compared with the present aspiration for 19 surface combatants. Self-evidently this would allow more tasks to be satisfactorily maintained, very many of them, even some minor conflict roles, well within the scope of smaller vessels. They would also, as major side benefits, provide more sea training opportunities, greater presence in suitable low intensity areas, including our own home waters and ports from which our naval vessels have largely disappeared, so removing the Royal Navy from the sight of most of the population of the UK. This would have deleterious effects on the nation's understanding and support of the Service. It should also assist with another essential, but often forgotten need, to preserve the continuity, skill base and even perhaps profitability of a healthier warship building industry, capable even of expansion if and when that might be needed. This is currently very far from guaranteed, and the future is always uncertain.

Honesty obliges me to say that this solution has almost always been opposed by the Navy itself, although I have never entirely understood why. Nevertheless proposing it is not likely to win me too many friends amongst the naval hierarchy. Their unease seems to stem from a feeling that acceptance of second rate ships would inevitably lead to the loss of first rate ships. Apart from demonstrating an extraordinary lack of confidence in their own ability to develop and articulate a sensible case, it seems to deny the eternal verities; it almost implies that having no ship is better than having a ship of lesser but *appropriate* capability. In fact of course, platforms' capability can be altered over time, especially if, as we should, we design the ships to be ready for this as warfare changes. Indeed the new ways of warfare might make this quite appropriate. Limiting hull numbers also precludes the Navy from engaging in activities which might bring the Navy more into public focus, whilst discharging desirable and necessary tasks. It almost suggests that doing what the Navy would like to do is more important than doing what needs to be done. Strong words perhaps, but I feel strongly, and always have done; no doubt we can pursue this subject in the question period.

## **Future Thinking**

It does however seem to me self-evident that some compromise is necessary in order to accomplish what must be accomplished and preserve a navy of critical mass to ensure the continuance of these tasks with whatever technology is appropriate in the future and give a base for expansion if needed. I suggest the two key principles are:

1. Although the navy should work much harder to shape public opinion – to shape the battlefield if you prefer that nomenclature – it is also necessary to be realistic about what is achievable and to remember the duty to preserve for our successors the tools they will need. We have lived off what our predecessors provided and our successors deserve the same.
2. The Navy must do not what it wants to do, but what needs to be done if it wishes to retain public support and win political support. It must fight cleverer not harder.



I have spoken long enough. And must now summarise what I believe our naval force structure might be before taking your questions and comments. I have no monopoly of wisdom!

I am assuming a replacement of the nuclear deterrent and the entry into service of both carriers with a substantial mixed air group, allowing at least one carrier to be operational all the time. If I am wrong, then we are in an entirely new situation. There will be a need for a nuclear submarine flotilla, a mine countermeasures capability, an airborne and general Anti Submarine Warfare (ASW) capability to support the deployment of the deterrent. These support forces will also be available, some of the time, for other naval operations, which might well include high end ASW, Anti Aircraft Warfare (AAW) and perhaps even Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD). There will be a need for a force of high capability surface combatants – I am suggesting about 12 or 13 - to escort Task Groups. There should then be a force of, I suggest, about 15 or so, second rate surface combatants; noting that after the completion of the current Offshore Patrol Vessels build, we shall already have 7, perhaps 15 is too pessimistic. It depends on the trade-off I have discussed. There will be a handful of other vessels for other tasks and of course a Royal Fleet Auxiliary Fleet to provide for amphibious support and fleet replenishment duties enabling whatever deployments are envisaged. I am taking the provision of helicopters at about the present level for granted, given the huge extra capability they give any surface combatant, although of course I am assuming that at least some of our aircraft establishment may be unmanned, with consequences for the manpower and skills required.

A possible solution is

- The Nuclear Deterrent
- Aircraft Carriers
- Amphibious Ships
- 13-14 High Capability Escorts
- 15 Second Raters
- Mine Counter Measures and Minor Tasks
- Royal Fleet Auxiliary
- Appropriate Aircraft

But of course it all depends on what the nation wants to do, and to end where I began – nothing, absolutely nothing comes cheap.

The keen eyed will have noticed that this force is, with one key exception, not too different from that currently envisaged, although I have got there by a different philosophical route which makes me feel more confident. Over time, this difference would probably lead to greater divergence. In the short term it is perhaps a cause to rejoice. But over it hangs a very dark cloud. Even this force, and keeping it current, is certain to require a significant increase in the budget currently available, and since the other two services, and importantly now a key new player in the Joint Force Command, are all in the same position. There is a compelling need to develop and fight hard with a strong and coherent intellectual case in the context of overall defence and security policy and requirements – and to engage with the vital political and public understanding and support that I have spoken of.

## **VICE ADMIRAL**

### **SIR JEREMY BLACKHAM KCB MA AFRUSI**

Sir Jeremy joined the Royal Navy in 1961, and had a wide range of sea appointments, including command of HM Ships, Beachampton, Ashanti, Nottingham and Ark Royal (when he commanded the first RN Task Group in the Adriatic during the Bosnian Crisis, setting up, and operating, enduring maritime operational arrangements with NATO and international authorities). A graduate of the Royal College of Defence Studies, he filled several important staff appointments ashore, including



Commandant of the Royal Navy Staff College, Director of Naval Plans, Director General Naval Personnel Strategy and Assistant Chief of the Navy Staff. In 1997, he was Deputy CINC Fleet and then the first Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Equipment Capability). In these posts he dealt closely with allies, especially with the USA and France in the policy and operations fields. In the latter appointment he was a key player in implementing the Smart Acquisition Initiative and set up the MoD Central Customer Organisation, working with all three services and outside agencies.

Leaving the RN in 2002, he joined the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company ADS in order to set up EADS UK, before becoming an independent consultant. He is a Director of Sarnmere Consulting Ltd, of Atmaana plc, Deputy Chairman of CondorPM and was Chair of the Blackheath Conservatoire of Music and the Arts from 2000-2007 and Trustee of Musicworks. He is an NED of Airbus Helicopters UK and an advisor to several medium and small companies. He was a Vice President, Trustee and Associate Fellow of RUSI from 1995 - 2012, and is the Editor of The Naval Review and a frequent writer on defence and related affairs and he has published around 100 articles in UK and abroad. He is a visiting lecturer in Public Management at Kings College London and on the Higher Command and Staff Course at Shrivenham and a member of the Chief of Defence Staff's Strategic Advisory Board.

His academic studies include majoring on the strategy and conduct of naval matters during the Peloponnesian War. A Freeman of the City of London and former RN cricketer, his interests are travel, reading, poetry, writing, music and opera, languages, walking and cricket. He lives in South East London and Suffolk.

## PROFESSOR ANDREW LAMBERT



Andrew Lambert is Laughton Professor of Naval History in the Department of War Studies at King's College, London, and Director of the Laughton Naval History Unit. His work focuses on the naval and strategic history of the British Empire between the Napoleonic Wars and the First World War and the evolution of seapower. His work has addressed a range of issues, including technology, policy-making, regional security, deterrence, historiography, crisis-management and conflict. He has lectured on aspects of his

work around the world, including recent work addressing the rediscovery of HMS Erebus in Canada.

He has made several television documentaries. His books include: *The Crimean War: British Grand Strategy against Russia 1853-1856*. Manchester 1990, *The War Correspondents: The Crimean War*. Gloucester 1994; '*The Foundations of Naval History*': Sir John Laughton, the Royal Navy and the Historical Profession. London 1997, *Nelson: Britannia's God of War*. London 2004, *Admirals*. London 2008, *Franklin: Tragic hero of Polar Navigation*. London 2009 and *The Challenge: Britain versus America in the Naval War of 1812*, London 2012, winner of Anderson Medal of the Society for Nautical Research for the best maritime history book.

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Inside Front: Container Ship leaves port, fully laden. Wikipedia Commons, Daily Telegraph.

Oil tanker at sea, fully laden . When oil prices are low, much oil is 'stored' at sea, with some ships constantly on the move awaiting customer orders. Wall Street Daily.

Inside Back: Container ship loading. Port facilities as well as shipping form part of the global 'supply chain', intimately linked 'backwards' to suppliers and manufacturers and 'forwards' to markets and consumers. Daily Telegraph.

Mischief Reef, South China Sea, a Chinese project to limit maritime access and deny freedom of movement at sea. Daily Telegraph, AP Reuters, photographer Ritchie B.Tongo.

'Showing the flag and securing the global commons'. In late October 2015 the American destroyers USS *Lassen*, *Shoup* and *McCampbell* emphasised the illegality of Chinese island- building in the South China Sea by steaming past the Mischief and Subi Reefs inside the 12 mile zone claimed as Chinese territory. U.S. Navy photo by Chief Photographer Mate Todd P. Cichonowicz Wikipedia Commons.

A Chinese warship launches a missile. [China/military.net/ category/Chinese-navy/page 2. 9 January 2016.](http://China/military.net/category/Chinese-navy/page%209)

Back Cover: *HMS Daring*, a Type 45 Air Defence Destroyer, leaving Portsmouth. Crown Copyright, photographer Leading Aircraftsman Gary Weatherly.

Royal Marine detachment intercepting a suspected pirate vessel off the Somali Coast during 'out-of- area' NATO anti-piracy operations, 2012. Mail/Guardian Africa.







