

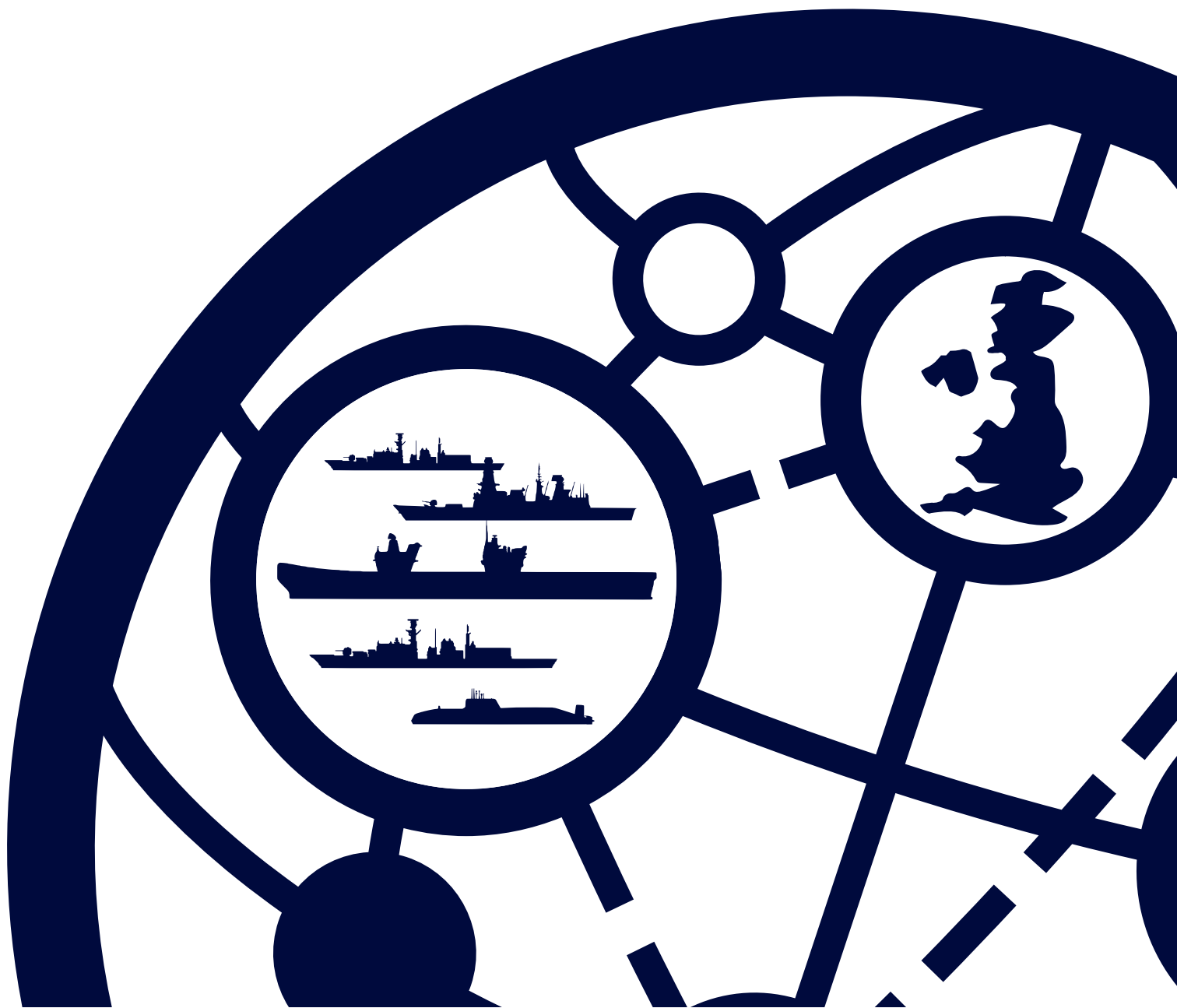
FIRST SEA LORD'S

SEA POWER

CONFERENCE 2023

Lancaster House & King's College Strand Campus | 16th-17th May 2023

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS





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Foreword



The 2023 Sea Power Conference at Lancaster House, hosted by the Royal Navy and the Council on Geostrategy, formed part of a week of events focusing on the maritime environment. The other events included celebration of the 50th anniversary of the UK-Netherlands Amphibious Force, our strongest and longest lasting amphibious relationship, and an event to mark the 60th Anniversary of the Polaris Sales Agreement (PSA). When it was signed, merely months after the Cuban Missile Crisis and during some of the darkest days of the Cold War, PSA represented a seminal moment in relations between the UK and the USA.

Over the two days we explored some of the most pressing challenges and opportunities facing those of us with an interest in the maritime domain. Sixteen months on from Russia's invasion of Ukraine the stark reality is that the world is forever changed. Russia remains an

international pariah but persists with its illegal war while others who would seek to challenge the Rules Based International Order are watching very closely.

The Government's Integrated Review Refresh published in March confirmed that the conclusions of the 2021 Integrated Review were right, but that in some areas they needed updating in the light of international events and changes in UK policy. For the Royal Navy, these outcomes confirmed that we must maintain our commitments to NATO and the Euro-Atlantic, while also continuing to look further afield to our partners and allies across the Indo-Pacific as part of the endeavour to put our approach to the region on a long term, strategic footing. But these are not separate endeavours; the intrinsic link between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific has never been more apparent. London is closer geographically to Beijing than Canberra is, and whilst those whose homes are in the Indo-Pacific feel the impacts of the Chinese Communist Party's divergence from our values far more acutely than we do, events there affect us all. I was therefore delighted to be joined by a number of my fellow Chiefs of Navy from around the world. This is recognition of the strength of our alliances and our shared desire to defend the Rules Based Order and advocate for free and open use of the great global commons.

As the world changes and challenges to the established order mount, we are also in an age where the rate of change of technology is only increasing. The speed of relevance today is quicker than it was yesterday and slower than it will be tomorrow. From data

exploitation to AI and hypersonics, what was once the preserve of science fiction is now part of our core business and continuing to develop exponentially faster. We are unlikely to stop operating ships any time soon, but there are numerous ways in the future that we may do this.

Today and in the future we need to be more aligned across the spectrum of military and civilian maritime sectors. Whilst warfighting is likely to remain broadly the preserve of militaries, the scale and breadth of sub-threshold activity, especially in the maritime domain, reminds us the effects and impacts of war are felt far beyond those on the front line. Working across Government, and with industry and the private sector, we can and must be better informed and better prepared, able to pre-empt nefarious activity and respond when required.

The discussions held over the two days aimed to improve our understanding, reflect on new ideas and develop our thinking as partners and allies drawn from around the world and across the broad maritime community. My intent was that this conference proved to be a productive contribution to charting a way through the many challenges and opportunities we face.

Admiral Sir Ben Key KCB CBE ADC

First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff, Royal Navy

Keynote speeches



The Rt. Hon. James Cartlidge MP

Minister for Defence Procurement, Ministry of Defence

It's a great pleasure to be here and even to those like me with no naval background, Sir Henry Leach needs no introduction.

It is a great honour to have been asked to deliver this lecture in his name, especially with his daughter Henrietta here in the audience. With many distinguished guests, colleagues and of course senior chiefs and indeed from our many allies around the world - it's a great pleasure to meet and see all of you.

During the Falklands conflict, as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's so-called "knight in shining gold braid", Sir Henry played a pivotal role in ensuring the Iron Lady stuck to her guns and secured freedom for the islanders. Yet as we prepare to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of the Battle of the Atlantic next weekend, we shouldn't forget that Sir Henry's early years were spent as a midshipman and later First Lieutenant in the stormy seas of the Second World War.

Indeed, he had been assigned to serve on HMS Prince of Wales until his father Captain John Leach was given command of the ship. Tragically, Captain John went down with his ship just two days after the pair had enjoyed a gin sling and swim together.

Despite such tragedy, Sir Henry distinguished himself in the war and as a junior lieutenant, was in charge of one of the 14-inch gun turrets in the battleship Duke of York which helped sink the German battlecruiser Scharnhorst off the North Cape in December 1943.

There can be little doubt that such formative experiences helped shape the character and resilience of the man who went on to become First Sea Lord.

A man who, when asked for his view on whether or not to send a taskforce to the Falklands, replied firmly: "It is not my business to say whether we should or not, but if we do not, if we

pussyfoot in our actions and do not achieve complete success, in another few months we shall be living in a different country whose word counts for little.”

On the surface 2023 appears to have very little in common with 1943. Yet, as Royal Navy and Allied warships sail to the Mersey ahead of three days of Battle of the Atlantic commemorations, it is striking how many of those challenges from Leach’s early wartime experiences remain relevant for us.

We might not be at war but we find ourselves once more having to confront the resurgence of state-based dangers. President Putin is blockading trade in the Black Sea, threatening the undersea cables which support everyday life and increasing activity in the South Atlantic.

And just as in the Second World War, the threats are truly global.

We see, for example, in the South Pacific, that China is continuing to expand its Navy while using its military and economic might to intimidate its neighbours. Again, much like the Battle of the Atlantic, we know these maritime challenges – coupled with the diverse dangers of terrorism and global criminal networks – will unfortunately endure.

Because the world is more dependent than ever on the oceans.

Global financial markets dependent upon tens of thousands of miles of underwater cabling. 90% of UK trade is carried by sea. And climate change is expected to raise the stakes – resulting in new sea lanes and accessible natural resources in the High North as temperatures rise and ice caps melt.

So, Sir Henry would not be surprised to find his beloved Royal Navy more in demand than ever.

Over the last year, our ships have been all over the world. Supporting NATO in Eastern Europe, leading exercises and training Ukrainian sailors in mine clearance. Operating in the High North alongside partners in the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). And conducting numerous weapons and drugs busts in the Gulf region.

All the while, demonstrating the very best of naval soft power around the globe with HMS Tamar and Spey visiting some 15 countries, delivering medical support to Pitcairn and emergency support to Tonga after the devastating volcano.

And who could forget the poignant role they have played at home? With 140 naval ratings pulling the Queen’s coffin through Westminster on the day of her funeral. As well as those who marched through the streets of London in the King’s coronation processions earlier this month.

So to those of you here today – and indeed all those who couldn’t make it – thank you for doing your duty for our country.

However, the Sea Power Conference is not an arena for self-congratulation.

As you all know our challenge now is to move our thinking on from the past and present to the future. None of us has a crystal ball. But here’s what we do know.

We know the threats are growing.

We know that rising demand is colliding with tighter budgets.

And we know, in Sir Henry’s words, that, “effective deterrence involves maintaining a high state of readiness, being well equipped and trained, and deploying wherever and whenever the situation demands.”

How, then, can we reconcile these competing objectives? To my mind we must borrow three

lessons from the Battle of the Atlantic.

Lesson one is about strengthening that key stakeholder our industrial base. In the Second World War, our force depended on the enormous power of our sovereign industries. With great yards on the Clyde, Mersey and Tyne churning out mighty warships at a rate of knots.

Now, we're determined to reinvigorate the famous British maritime sector. Not just so we can produce the hard power required to succeed in this more dangerous era. But so the sector itself becomes a kind of soft power deterrent – showing our adversaries that our small island has the capability to keep making battle-winning ships for as long as it takes.

And we're going to achieve that by providing industry with a clear demand signal – with a fresh pipeline of cutting-edge vessels coming in over the next 30 years including Dreadnoughts, Astutes, SSN-AUKUS, Fleet Solid Support ships and next-generation frigates.

By working much more closely with suppliers, giving them the confidence to invest and upskill in the right areas. And by helping them win commercial and export orders in major new global markets.

The totality overall demand or demand signal is something I've thought about and will do much more in future as Procurement Minister.

We're also supporting the next generation of shipwrights by investing in training programmes and skills academies. With the likes of Babcock, BAE and others as they put apprentices and graduates through their paces around the country.

Ensuring we have a powerful on-shore advanced manufacturing skills base for decades to come, so that the Royal Navy always has the firepower it needs to carry out its plans.

Lesson two is about encouraging innovation across the sector. The advent of radar and sonar helped swing the Battle of the Atlantic our way in days gone by.

But today, technologies are advancing at a frightening pace.

AI, for example, is already revolutionising the way data and satellite imagery is informing decision-making in battle, while also enabling forces to carry out dangerous missions with uncrewed aircraft, vehicles and ships.

If we don't stay ahead of the curve there is a risk that vessels designed in 2023 could be obsolete in ten years' time frankly a lot less.

Part of that is about integrating new technologies onto existing platforms. And this is where NavyX comes in, the team with the mission to get new technologies from the drawing board to the frontline as quickly as possible. And to help them do that, they've got the new and unique Experimental Vessel Patrick Blackett.

Named after the former sailor and Nobel Prize winning scientist, Patrick Blackett provides the safe environment we need to test all the game-changing ideas coming over the horizon.

Now we just need to make the most of it. By working with the regulator to unlock the maximum potential of Patrick Blackett and future technology. While adapting our existing platforms in the here and now, to ensure we stay one step ahead of our adversaries.

Which brings me onto my third and final lesson. The importance of partnerships.

Sir Henry wouldn't have got far in the Battle of the Atlantic without the support of allies like France and later the US and Canada.

As we are seeing today in Ukraine, great partnerships are still a great capability in their own right.

And this year we're also celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Polaris Sales Agreement.

A major part of one of the most enduring bilateral relationships in history, it saw the US supplying us with our very first nuclear missiles, heralding the start of the ultimate deterrent which has kept us safe from the most extreme threats ever since.

The truth is that while our adversaries lack allies they can trust, we are part of a large family united by values we've fought and died to protect – Freedom, justice and a commitment to democracy. And as the dangers around us grow, we're seeing a renewed commitment to NATO across the board.

That's why, here in the UK, the Navy is making a substantial commitment to NATO's New Force Model – including our Carrier Strike Group – in addition to regular contributions to NATO operations. But we're also operating on a smaller multi-lateral level, ramping up our collaboration with our partners in the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) which is the 10-nation coalition aiming to preserve peace in Northern Europe.

Over the last year, the JEF has been at the forefront of providing military, economic and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Joint patrols, led by the British Type 23 frigate HMS Richmond, have been joined by Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, and Danish ships, supported by Swedish and Danish fighter aircraft. And last year we held Exercise Cold Response near Norway, one of the biggest exercises in Europe since the end of the Cold War.

We're also strengthening our partnerships beyond Europe. In the Indo-Pacific, which we all know is one of the main strategic chokepoints in the world, we are persistently operating two ships to reassure allies and partners, while helping to uphold freedom of navigation in the region.

By 2030, our five new Type-31 frigates will further enhance our global reach. And at an industrial level, the T-26 continues to garner interest in the export market, having already been selected for the Hunter class frigate programme in Australia and the Surface Combatant programme in Canada.

But you and I know there is much more we can do. And one of my priorities will be to make sure we get even more out of our international ties both at an operational and industrial level.

The three lessons I've outlined today – strengthening industry, encouraging innovation and bolstering partnerships – are embodied in what is our most powerful partnership of the last few decades – AUKUS.

AUKUS is not just creating thousands of skilled jobs here in the UK, strengthening our industrial base. And it's not just enabling the sharing of skills and expertise as we break new ground together on cutting-edge designs.

But, crucially, it's uniting three great allies as we work together to protect our common interests. That is the benchmark for the kind of deals we're looking to make in the coming months and years.

So, as I've said, we're living at a dangerous time. A period of rising dangers. But some things have not changed.

Our maritime power is as important as it has ever been. So we must do everything we can to enhance Sir Henry's great legacy through industry, through innovation and through international partnerships.

We must continue to channel his great willpower and his great belief in the values that underpin our daily lives.

Because, if we do not, the warning he gave to Mrs Thatcher still holds true; "We shall be living in a different country whose word counts for little".

Keynote speeches



The Rt. Hon. Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP *Minister for the Indo-Pacific, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office*

Sir Ben, thank you and thank you, Viktorija. Thank you to the Council on Geostrategy for bringing us together today through this lens of the First Sea Lord's annual conference to discuss those challenges of maritime security in its many guises in this growing and challenging global environment.

Good morning to all of you here, and I know also a wider but equally august crowd online. It's always great to see Lancaster House being put to good use in bringing great minds together from military, academic to industrial leadership.... As well as you may have noticed, the pomp and ceremony it was part of for the coronation just a few days ago.

It is always a pleasure to welcome – and I know I am allowed to say this, I asked permission first, my mother is French, so I'd like to particularly welcome our French colleagues and Admiral Vandier to the place where the Lancaster House Treaties have been negotiated over decades.

As an island nation and a global trading power, the UK is constantly focused on the seas and oceans, and as James mentioned, we've been doing it a long time – since Queen Elizabeth the First we have made use of the global waterways for our prosperity, and have been leaders in ensuring we can defend them for our security, but also for the peace and freedom of many others.

Day to day, as over a third of the UK's food is imported, the protection of maritime trade routes has a direct effect on all our daily lives – and perhaps we don't do enough to ensure that our citizens really understand the importance of the Royal Navy's daily workload.

Globally, 3 billion people rely on the sea for their food security: more than ever, this now brings new levels of challenge around responsible stewardship of the marine habitats that sustain us all, with the need for protein which nations with growing young populations need.

So as we provide leadership in the protection of sustainable ocean habitats, we are also charged with supporting those smaller nations for whom defending and protecting their EEZs, - their exclusive economic zones, which sovereign states under UNCLOS have sovereign rights over to explore and use their own marine resources.

This is proving less than straightforward when faced with those large distant fishing fleets who don't share or respect their responsibilities.

In my recent visit to the Philippines, I was struck by the existential threat felt from the gangs of Chinese militia boats gathered overfishing overfishing shoal waters, leaving local fishermen under daily threat.

The maritime domain is under increasing pressure from systemic competition, driven by those resource needs, and is facing levels of threat and coercion not seen since World War 2. I believe that its therefore right to say we are genuinely entering a 'new maritime century'.

The reality is that maritime protection needs have never gone away, but rather that we have should always have remained focused on the maritime.

With constrained defence budgets, and post the fall of the Berlin Wall, which perhaps brought a naïve assumption of peaceful times ahead, followed by land wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the maritime has been quietly getting on with its job without as much attention as it needed.

Our Royal Navy continues to make us proud as the great guardian of our nation's security near and far, and is respected and welcomed around the globe by our friends and allies. The expertise and trust which others share in our sailors continues to be a powerful deterrent to those who would flout the laws of the sea.

The Royal Navy guards our national security and wider maritime stability – the leading European nation in NATO, bringing our Continuous At Sea Deterrent submarine enterprise to the defence of all, and forging the alliances and partnerships around the world that make us all safer and protect our ways of life.

The threats we face today and in the years ahead may seem diverse and indeed far away, but they are all interconnected. It is vital if we are to continue to maintain freedom of navigation both for

- civilian shipping
- safe use of the sea for sourcing clean energy
- and the sustainable management of the sea and seabed's natural resources

that we build and deliver multi-pronged strategies.

Threats to global supply chains, the militarisation of the seas, and the erosion of global norms like freedom of navigation are more real than perhaps many of our UK citizens can imagine in our calm European waters.

The degradation of fish stocks, and the precariousness of maritime livelihoods has the potential to wreak havoc with many nations' basic ability to feed their people. The fair management and sustainable harvesting of the sea's resources is critical to maintaining peaceful, thriving communities.

The region which poses the greatest opportunity but also risks to UK interests is the Indo-Pacific.

For too many here in Europe, this seems far away and can be ignored in favour of those urgent tactical crises much closer to home, in Ukraine. But that misses the point of the indivisibility of the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific to global challenges.

So to ensure it is those opportunities which prevail, rather than the risks of disturbed or

broken sea lanes and the safety of maritime sovereignty, our naval colleagues all need to work together to ensure the Indo-Pacific remains stable and free together.

This is why the Indo-Pacific is at the heart of our long-term foreign policy strategy, as we restated in our Integrated Review Refresh published in March – it is crucial to sustaining free trade, freedom of action, and freedom from coercion.

Sixty percent of global shipping passes through the region, for which stability there has a direct impact on households and businesses right here. When I am trying to explain to constituents what this all means, why I am on a plane half of my life going to visit countries very, very far away, I try and set it out by saying that it is about the goods we purchase every day, from your washing machine to the prawns in the supermarket. They come by ship through the South China Seas and those wider sea routes. If those routes become blocked, or unsafe for civilian shipping, the economic shocks would be dramatic.

Beyond the present dependencies, more than half of global growth is projected to come from the Indo-Pacific by 2050, so we need to ensure the UK is right at the heart of the region's successful future – so we must be alive to the threats, working with allies to counter them, so that in concert our businesses and people can maximise the UK's interests and opportunities.

The Indo-Pacific, beyond its growing potential to be an economic powerhouse, is also full of potential for clean energy resources, and the UK wants to be able to continue to bring our world leading expertise in clean energy, from wind to nuclear, to support and help to build sustainable business growth and livelihoods.

So in our agreements and partnerships with nations from Vanuatu to the Republic of Korea, from Bangladesh to Indonesia, the UK is focused on bringing our expertise to support positive impacts in coastal communities, alongside building expertise in marine science, and sharing educational resources.

But all of this depends on ensuring that the maritime environment for all these Indo-Pacific countries is safe and free from coercive shipping which would restrict their potential in their own waters.

The UK government's £500 million Blue Planet Fund is an important part of our leadership on marine issues, supporting developing countries to protect the environment and reduce poverty. It is one of the tools in our armoury to deliver the challenges set out in the Integrated Review Refresh, to tackle biodiversity loss, to halt and reverse plastic pollution, and to protect 30% of the world's oceans by 2030.

This is work which we will deliver most effectively working with our key naval partners, especially through our Anglo-French alliance set on an even stronger course after our recent Anglo-French summit. These are tough targets because the oceans always have the power to surprise.

As with so many coastal regions, the North Sea – alongside my constituency's 64 mile border in the North of England – can be both friend and foe. It's giving us vast new resources of sustainable offshore wind power, but ferocious storms and the coldest climate in the country. Storm Arwen ripped through my patch in November 2021 and we are even now only starting to see normality resume with the opening of the National Park this spring after forestry was devastated.

The ferocity of Storm Arwen took everyone by surprise. But it was nothing compared to that which hit Ukraine last year, as Russia illegally invaded a sovereign neighbour. And whilst NATO and many other nations from around the world are doing all we can to support the Ukrainian war effort and their humanitarian needs, we should not overlook the maritime challenges the Ukraine crisis has created.

Economically, a secure, stable Black Sea is essential not only to rebuild Ukraine's future, but because it is the sea lane which provides a vast proportion of the grain and fertiliser needs of

East Africa and beyond.

The world needs those exports from the ‘breadbasket of Europe’ to resume and stabilise, alongside Ukraine’s need to deliver to the world for its own economic success. Trade and security go hand in hand, and it’s our navies who defend and ensure these flows of goods can continue safely.

We should also be much more comfortable in confronting the fact that the strategic link between maritime security in the Euro-Atlantic and in the Indo-Pacific are indivisible.

Where Russian actions flout the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, this provides China with an excuse also to disregard international norms, to ignore the rules-based international system for their benefit, destroying the option of a free and open Indo-Pacific for all.

So as we approach the NATO summit in Vilnius – I know we’re joined by Admiral Gilday and Rear Admiral Skoog Haslum this morning – the increasingly strong demonstration of defence in the Baltic, to deal with the urgent tactical situation we face, needs to demonstrate the capability and intent of those of us determined to defend free, safe and open global waters.

The NATO partnership, through our transatlantic bonds, are keeping more than a billion citizens secure. But the rest of the world’s oceans and seas do not feel free and open to too many of the Indo-Pacific countries I visit week in week out as the UK’s Indo-Pacific minister.

So the UK, as a committed global maritime partner, is finding new ways to bring our expertise and support to the region. Perhaps the most challenging, exciting and long-term is AUKUS, a trilateral agreement to create an arc of defence and deterrence for the Indo-Pacific.

AUKUS demonstrates how longstanding partners can come together to tackle the new threats. Together with the US and Australia, we are going to build a new global and interoperable nuclear-powered submarine capability, that will not only support a free and open Indo-Pacific, but will also strengthen UK contribution to NATO in Europe.

AUKUS will create that next generation of expert engineers, welders, logisticians, programme managers, data analysts, regulators, and machinists to mention but a few, who will be building these new boats, alongside the need for growth in the number of submariners serving in the Royal Navy and Royal Australian Navy, with an extensive skill set needed to safely operate nuclear-powered submarines – and we will maximise our impact by creating a shared workforce.

This will bring new well-paid jobs for whole life careers for a growing workforce in Barrow, Plymouth, Rosyth and Faslane in the UK, alongside whole new workforces in Adelaide and Perth in Australia. This is not without its challenges, and the UK has a leading role to play in ensuring that our commitment to this huge military programme of work is a national endeavour here in the UK.

AUKUS submarines are part of Australia’s defence programme, but the Royal Navy and the UK’s submarine industrial enterprise will be critical to their success. Not since JFK’s determination to put a man on the moon, and NASA’s all encompassing national focus – where even the cleaners believed they were integral to the success of the project – has there been such a challenge to our industries and education systems.

Our universities and schools need to have AUKUS at the heart of their STEM programmes, so that every young person in school today has the chance to choose a lifetime career which is part of AUKUS:

- a global project designed to build submarines – yes
- a multifaceted activity to design new technologies of weaponry and undersea deterrence – yes

but perhaps most importantly, to be part of the commitment by the UK to grow the

capabilities of our allies to defend their backyard, to keep the Indo-Pacific free and open, so that those nations who cannot defend themselves know that the AUKUS family is alongside them.

I hope that, by laying the groundwork with our partners now, by investing in the solutions of the future, the threats from Indo-Pacific nations who demonstrate coercive behaviours in those waters, will understand that the UK stands firmly alongside our Indo-Pacific neighbours to weather any storms.

We must not turn away.

What we must do – given the scale of the challenge – is to come together, in partnership with friends old and new, to deter and defend against threats to maritime stability, and to ensure our strategic advantage in the maritime domain.

Interoperability with our allies will be a core source of strength. Interchangeability will make us stronger still.

Navies need to combine their power with diplomatic support, while our diplomatic efforts need to amplify our willingness and capacity to protect our collective interests, whether in home waters or across the world.

The Navy's Maritime Domain Awareness Programme is our gold standard for using our security expertise to build trust, partnership and capabilities, including with Middle Ground countries under pressure from revisionist states.

Strong deterrence and joint working are its watchwords.

And so my call to action today is to take the long view. It's for an end to the 'seablindness' that can creep into an ever more complex foreign policy, and for a look into foreign policy priorities in every aspect of the processes of naval planning.

Ultimately, it's our combined commitment to bring together our collective wisdom, listening to those few with deep expertise in delivery of maritime security through decades of confrontations under our oceans.

These challenges are not new, but ensuring success requires that we all lean in to deliver on our commitment. And the rationale for AUKUS is because the Indo-Pacific is a really huge expanse of water. We need more submarine capability providing deterrence in the only stealth environment remaining, across these vast areas.

We will only deliver the pace needed if we make this a national endeavour. If we don't get our deterrence posture right, coercion could become aggression all too quickly.

But if we do, we can assure the security and prosperity not only for my constituents, but for all those who are banking on us.

Thank you.

Keynote speeches



Admiral Sir Ben Key KCB CBE ADC

First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff, Royal Navy

This year's Conference is part of the London Sea Power Series, a set of events deliberately designed to celebrate the maritime domain and bring together those with an interest in it in order to consider the challenges and opportunities of our time, and celebrate some of our closest relationships.

On Monday we in the Royal Navy marked the 50th anniversary of signing of an agreement between the United Kingdom and Netherlands Amphibious Forces which has seen the Royal Marines and Netherlands Marines Corps train, exercise and deploy alongside each other in our oldest amphibious relationship.

Tomorrow, in the grandeur of the Old Royal Naval College at Greenwich, we will mark the 60th anniversary of the Polaris Sales Agreement, one of the most significant intergovernmental agreements the United Kingdom has made, in this case with the United States. Laid in 1963 it has been fundamental to the United Kingdom's ability to deliver Continuous At Sea Deterrence. So this is proving quite a week.

The Art of Admiralty

I would really endorse to you Professor Andrew Lambert's 'Art of Admiralty' essay in your conference programme, preferably after I've finished speaking. Because it underscores much of the reason and the ideas we have brought you together in this format. To try and join together the public and private sector, industry, business and academia to talk about the maritime environment as holistically as we can.

For 500 years the Royal Navy has stood ready to defend the United Kingdom and her interests at sea. To upholding the right to freedom of navigation, enabling trade and supporting the economy, the life blood of our country. We are here to defend the nation and help it prosper. And it is a role we gladly undertake on behalf of our island community. It involves engaging with allies, making new friends and fielding the best technology, making the most of every opportunity across the domain.

I look forward to much more of this. I don't know if there will still be ships upon the sea in another 500 years but the sea will still exist, and we at least will be around for much of that history. Our trade will continue to travel by sea and our energy and data under it – the statistics on volumes, all above 90%, need no repeating by me. And there are threats to our peace and prosperity which have been discussed in great detail already. As a navy we also have to be able to support our commitments to NATO and the Euro-Atlantic, to be able to deploy globally to engage with and reassure our partners and allies wherever they are, and to ensure that the people who share our values, likeminded around the world, can see us as reliable, dependable and engaged

In the 21st Century seapower has to be from seabed to space, from sea and at sea, and a whole of nation endeavour if we are to deter those who would increasingly seek to challenge the rules based international order and our way of life through activity in the grey-zone. So the 'art' that Professor Lambert describes is something not of historical curiosity but an essential, necessary piece of today and the future, and it is something I think we need to regain. Regain a confidence in practising, regain a confidence in talking about it and regain the way in which we go about our business. And the Royal Navy cannot do it all alone by any stretch of the imagination.

But as an organisation with an interest in the maritime discourse, with a recognisable brand, and some deep dependencies on others then it is essential I believe that we step into the space and help catalyse and convene the conversations and initiatives like the one that we are having today. We will always be an island and the opportunity exists therefore, in fact the obligation, for us to be a seapower state, aligning our national interests with our investment and engagement in the maritime, creating prosperity and security, working with allies and deterring our adversaries.

Shipbuilding

This will not happen overnight, but I am hugely positive about some of the things I am seeing already. Just over a year ago I spoke in Rosyth where our Type 31 frigates are being built and issued a call to arms to industry to be not just contractors, but partners on the journey as we develop the fleet of the future. They have responded, and frankly I needed them to. We now have on order, or in build 16 ships and 6 submarines and that just represents the major capital programmes.

The investments in the Royal Navy, even in the last 12 months, have been significant – three new Fleet Solid Support ships, a further five Type 26 have been put on order. SSN-AUKUS is in design. HMS Anson has joined the Fleet. RFA Proteus and RFA Stirling Castle will very soon be in service. The next decade is one of real change for the Royal Navy and the investment is hugely welcome across a spread of capabilities.

I recognise that some of them are deemed exquisite and have vocal detractors who advocate simply for more mass saying that we cannot afford to pursue high-end, niche capabilities. Clearly, I would welcome more ships, but that cannot be at the expense of being able to undertake the most complex tasks.

As we watch the increasing deployment by Russia of their most modern submarines, some of the very quietest in the world, you would expect me to be investing in the cutting-edge technology anti-submarine capabilities that allow us to detect, find and if necessary defeat them. This is not cheap. But I don't see coming second in the theatre ASW battle as a desirable option. As we look to the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Atlantic in a week's time it wasn't something that we contemplated then and it isn't something that we should contemplate now.

But we don't need all of our platforms to be high end and exquisite and there is a place for a ship that has a lower price tag without the same range of capabilities but something that can be operated flexibly, updated with greater agility and delivered in greater mass, deployed widely around the world and this is what we are seeking in the Type 31 class.

Technological Change

Platforms alone are not the answer. Such is the speed of technological change, it is likely in the future that the hull will be one of the few bits of a ship that actually remains constant. If we are to be a credible navy for a seapower state then we must be at the leading edge of developing and adopting new technology and innovations.

This cannot be done on fluffy vision statements or science projects and a sprinkling of fairy dust; it must be about adapting at the speed of relevance, understanding what is available to us, taking some risk, innovating, experimenting and then finding that technology and systems are available to us when we need them and when we don't, moving on.

This week, Patrick Blackett, our experimental technology ship is in London. She is dedicated to exactly this purpose: trialling new equipment, new ideas, to help us introduce it to service rapidly and to inform our learning as we do so. For example, in partnership with Imperial College, she is currently testing a quantum accelerometer, a means by which we can safely navigate in a satellite denied environment, ensuring we can continue to operate, even if others cannot.

It matters because others are investing here heavily too. By some estimates Chinese public investment in quantum technology in 2021 was 50% of the global total. And in the future both our escorts and aircraft carriers will operate a mix of crewed and uncrewed aircraft. Leading the way in this field will be persistent uncrewed rotary wing systems and jet powered Banshee drones.

We have a vision in the near term of deploying more highly capable, long range and long endurance surveillance and offensive strike platforms: launched from aircraft carriers, recovered to them and ensuring therefore deployable agility around the world. But it is not just about the sensors. We also need to advance our ability to deliver lethal long-range offensive fires against our adversaries. Hence the decision to ensure the Mark 41 Vertical Launch Silo is fitted to the Type 26 and, I am delighted to say, we intend to fit it also to our Type 31 frigates. This will enable potential use of a large variety of current and future anti-air, anti-surface, ballistic missile defence and strike missiles.

AI

So we are making significant investment in physical technology but we are also working in the digital space too. Because if that the pace of change is rapid, at times, particularly in AI, it is breath-taking. Everyone, friend and potential adversary alike is stepping into this space and it is causing us to reimagine warfare, creating dynamic new benchmarks for accuracy, efficiency and lethality.

So we are being deliberately ambitious, because we have to be. The goal is enhanced lethality and survivability through the deployment of AI-enabled capabilities. So we must build this into everything we do, particularly how we gather, process, move and store data not just at the tip of the spear but also in our business practices and processes.

People

However, for all the technology and data and the potential it has to enhance and support their work, it will remain our people who are the beating heart of the service. The fundamental nature of human conflict is well understood and is such that well educated, well trained and well led people will still be the decisive factor in 21st century competition and war.

We will continue to offer our people the opportunity to travel globally and we will continue to

give them the chance to operate the best and newest technology. They join the navy to see the world and we will do all we can to show them it, not leave them in port. But the workforce and their expectations of employers are changing, and we have to change too.

We know that many of our new entrants to the service are no longer choosing a career for life and so we must be more agile in allowing people to enter and leave, seamless transition between regular and reserve service and out into broader industrial space. And also recognise that some of the specialist skillsets we need will not require years of journeyman's time through the ranks. So, I really welcome the review of Armed Forces incentivisation by Rick Haythornthwaite due to be published soon which I think will lay out a framework for us to envisage a really radical new workforce offer.

Clearly, if you want to command an anti-aircraft destroyer, we can set the template as to the qualifications you need to have for command. If you want to be an engineer working in AI, why can't you have something the Second Sea Lord describes as a zig-zag career, moving in and out of uniform, moving in and out of the sector with great freedom. Competition in the employment marketplace is fierce, but underneath that we must also do the best by the people we have now, and so ensuring that we are making a holistic offer to them and their families has to be the heart of any new future design for the Royal Navy.

Geostrategic Picture – Power of maritime forces

As I look at our current and future platforms and the opportunities available to those who are young and serving today or soon to join, I do so with a degree of envy. As a result of investment over the last two decades we now operate two fifth-generation aircraft carriers, nuclear powered ballistic and attack submarines a range of aircraft, escorts and support ships to allow us to deploy globally, as well as fielding an elite amphibious fighting force. There are very few navies in the world which can do this and so I am delighted that we remain in that first tier.

I am also delighted that people are still interested in what we are doing and thinking about and so many foreign heads of navy would come here to contribute to our debate, in the same way we seek them out and learn from what they are doing. It is why when the need to evacuate citizens from Sudan came about last month, it was the Royal Marines of 40 Commando, our rapidly deployable early intervention force, who were the first in, supported by strategic lift from the Royal Air Force, with HMS Lancaster soon arriving in Port Sudan days later.

The decision by the Secretary of State to deploy the Carrier Strike Group into the Indo-Asia Pacific in 2021, as has been much discussed here already, enabled us to showcase on the global stage the convening power of fifth generation deployable aircraft carriers and an international task group. We sailed halfway around the world and back, sustained through a period of difficult global COVID pandemic.

Although the big deployments make the international headlines, it is just a fraction of what the carriers are capable of. In the last year they have trained and operated across the EuroAtlantic, from the High North to the Mediterranean, underscoring our commitment to NATO, to our JEF partners and to our wider allies. And we have plans and ideas being put forward to reinforce that. It is the UK's strategic conventional deterrent capability and we will continue to hold the aircraft carriers at very high readiness to deploy in the event of crisis, demonstrating the flexibility and agility.

Back to Art of Admiralty

So the pace of change we find ourselves in in the world today and our navy is rapid; we are facing an environment that is evolving faster than ever. And the scale of the challenge ahead of us also feels generational; it feels like another Dreadnought moment. But it will be for nought if we do not consider this as a national endeavour, reflecting the essential nature of the sea for our prosperity, our way of life, our place in the world. So as well as the change we are generating inside the service, I am determined that we capitalise on an even more collective maritime endeavour of national and international undertaking.

I recently met with the Secretary General of the International Maritime Organisation at their headquarters here in London. Kitack Lim and I talked how we as a Service can help support his intent for reinforcing leadership and engagement in the international maritime community, around UNCLOS and its importance. How we can help bring to the fore voices not just from Government but our international partners.

We are talking to University Technical Colleges about how we can continue to invest in the young of the country Ensuring the development of STEM skills in the next generation. Working alongside not just those who would join our service, but also the Merchant Marine. Talking to some of the City Colleges about the sort of apprentices we offer and how we can invest in the development of the next generation.

We also have a remarkable network of former Royal Navy personnel working across the maritime enterprise from business, to industry, in shipyards and ports, to Government. Whilst they no longer wear their uniform, they help provide a network that for us enables the catalysing conversations that we want to have. And our Maritime Domain Awareness programme provides an understanding of activity at sea to improve security internationally, providing free support across the breadth of the maritime sector.

These are just a few of things that I think Art of Admiralty is about. As I have said on a number of occasions, we are not the sole guardians of the great ideas, not by any stretch of the imagination. We want to listen humbly to what others have to say, we want to learn from them and then understand where we can engage and make a difference.

Conclusion

Because as a Navy we have with national and global reach, increasing punch, technically minded and we are just starting to exploit the opportunities ahead. We have a wealth of people, talent and connective tissue across the maritime organisations in this country and we have national and international friends, allies and partners who matter to us, and we like to think we matter to them.

We must make our voice heard and increase the recognition once again about the vital importance of the sea for our island nation and the global community. This is what a seapower state does, what I believe the United Kingdom is and should be and must be into the future and I look forward to the part that we will play in continuing to drive it forward.

Thank you.

Panels and sessions

We are genuinely entering a “new maritime century”.[1]

– Anne-Marie Trevelyan,
Minister of State (Indo-Pacific)

In 2023, the First Sea Lord’s Sea Power Conference was organised around the theme of ‘Steel and statecraft: Mobilising naval power in a competitive age.’ This theme was chosen to account for the fact that competition in the maritime domain – from the Black Sea to the Taiwan Strait – has intensified in recent years, while the maritime forces of authoritarian states have grown in size and sophistication, forcing free and open nations, such as the United Kingdom (UK), to rethink their maritime postures.

Geopolitical competition comes at a time when the maritime domain continues to underwrite international prosperity, despite the fact that the importance of trade routes, undersea cables, ports and sea-based infrastructure is often overlooked in even the most maritime of countries. ‘Sea blindness’ and apathy toward the function and importance of naval power and the maritime domain remains acute.

The First Sea Lord’s Sea Power Conference 2023, held on 16th–17th May at Lancaster House, aimed to explore these issues and other geopolitical trends through a mixture of panels, speeches and conversations. For the first time, it also included a ‘Future Maritime Leader’s Laboratory’ to bring together young maritime practitioners and connect them with one another while enhancing their geostrategic thinking. Representatives from Britain and many of its allies and partners participated in the conference, which ultimately facilitated understanding of the growing importance of maritime power in an increasingly volatile and maritime-focused geopolitical environment.

Panel 1, ‘The art of admiralty: Mobilising national power in a competitive age’, focused on highlighting the significance of maritime power in national security debates. In part through historical analysis of the Admiralty’s role in the 18th century, the panel explored the need for better advocacy of the important roles navies the world over play in securing their home countries’ prosperity, how the financial sector and maritime industry can collaborate, and which cross-government stakeholders need to work together to maintain naval strength. The panel was chaired by V. Adm. (rtd.) Sir Clive Johnstone, and featured Monica Kohli, Prof. Andrew Lambert, V. Adm. René Tas and Jason Wrigley.

Panel 2, ‘Competing at sea: Naval power and active deterrence’, delved into the use of naval power in deterring potential adversaries from attempting to revise, degrade, and even destroy, the open international order. The actions of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Russia and Iran were a particular focus of the panel, as well as how allies and partners through different forms of deployment and regionally-tailored deterrence strategies can deter and dissuade threats and challenges to their interests. The panel was chaired by Prof. Alessio Patalano and featured R. Adm. Edward Ahlgren, R. Adm. Ewa Skoog Haslum, Dr Nicolas Mazzuchi and Dr Philip Shetler-Jones.

Panel 3, ‘Aligning power: Leading by design’, investigated how navies can act to generate a centre of gravity for national policy as they convene and align other countries bilaterally or in wider coalitions. Successful cases, such as the Japanese concept of a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’, were used as case studies to inform how the Royal Navy can foster relationships old and new and align allies and partners under a common vision. The panel was chaired by Emma Salisbury and featured Ian Bowers, V. Adm. Martin Connell, Stephen Lillie and Maj. Gen. Jim Morris.

Panel 4, 'Maintaining a competitive edge: Operationalising technology in maritime warfare', looked into the hardware and advanced technologies that navies require to maintain a competitive edge. The panel investigated contemporary case studies – from the South China Sea to the Black Sea – to shed light on how technology interacts with operations, and how it may be used by authoritarian states and shared amongst them to gain strategic advantage. The panel was chaired by Shashank Joshi and featured R. Adm. Rune Andersen, Dr Richard Drake, Julie Marionneau, R. Adm. James Parkin and Julian Pawlak.

Panel 5, 'Steel and statecraft in a maritime century', concluded the conference with a discussion on the importance of navies to national prosperity and the subsequent need to, in the UK's case, entrench the persona of a seapower state. The panel was chaired by James Rogers and featured Abi Clayton, Alina Frolova, Prof. Jamie Gaskarth and Mike Knott.

Beyond these panels, the conference also included an 'in-conversation' session with Adm. Michael M. Gilday, Adm. Sir Ben Key and Adm. Pierre Vandier, the three leaders of the American, British and French navies, chaired by Viktorija Starych-Samuoliene. This focused on the connection between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres, as well as the impact of climate change and increasing geopolitical competition – two of the driving forces drawing the two regions into one: the 'Atlantic-Pacific'.



Key themes

Several key themes emerged from the conference. These include ‘sea blindness’, the rise of a maritime century, the ‘art of admiralty’, deterrence, the importance of allies and partners, and innovation and new technologies.

‘Sea blindness’ in a maritime century

As an island residing to the northwest of the European continent, Britain is inherently a maritime country. Since mediaeval times, British history has been deeply entwined with the sea, from fishing and trade to harnessing the sea’s potential as a medium from which to defend the country and project power around the world. And it is not the only nation whose prosperity and security is heavily derived from the sea, with Australia, Finland, France, Japan, Norway, and the Netherlands also being salient examples of maritime nations.

Today, some 90% of all of global trade flows by sea and, more crucially, almost all of the world’s communications take place through an intricate network of 1.2 million kilometres of submarine cables (see the Map on page 40).[2] The sea also continues to play a pivotal role in defence for many nations, not least through the continued deployment of Continuous At-Sea Deterrent (CASD) – and foreign policy, where, for example, the growing presence of British, French and Dutch naval forces in the Indo-Pacific has strengthened old and fostered new relationships in the region.

With climate change and the intensification of geopolitics – particularly at sea – the world is also entering a maritime century. Not only does the maritime environment underwrite global prosperity through connecting economies the world over via the facilitation of trade, but it also constitutes a large piece of the sustainability puzzle: seagrass meadows, tidal marshes and mangroves can store double the amount of carbon as some of the world’s forests and swathes of offshore wind turbines are advancing the clean energy transition.[3] The sea is also where the effects of climate change are being felt most keenly, raising awareness and the need for ocean and coastal-centred adaption and mitigation measures.

The world also is increasingly maritime because the greatest powers are competing – even confronting – one another at sea. This has been stark in the Euro-Atlantic. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014 allowed it to project power from the Black Sea into the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. The Kremlin’s renewed aggression against Ukraine in 2022 also severed a key artery in the global grain and cereal supply chain, leading to rising global food insecurity.[4] Equally, in the Indo-Pacific, the PRC has attempted to ‘continentalise’ the South China Sea and exert pressure across the Taiwan Strait to assert dominance over the surrounding waters.[5]

But the ocean is not an arena only for competition. Take illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing as an example: the PRC’s Coast Guard and maritime militia have been reported to enter other nations’ waters regularly and intimidate legally operating fishing vessels to depart.[6] This undermines local fishing communities, putting those reliant on fish for their income in a precarious position which encourages illegal fishing, perpetuating the cycle of unlawful activity. The desire (and need) for maritime governance increases as a result, not just from the nation being infringed upon, but also those around it. Smaller states are thus given the opportunity to exert influence by engaging in standard setting and law-enforcement operations and have their cause elevated.

Despite the onset of the maritime century, the seapower ethos which has been central to the maritime strength of many is fraying, while the maritime world has become increasingly distant from the hearts and minds of publics the world over. This has led to a degree of ‘sea blindness’: the maritime environment continues to underwrite prosperity, yet many have



‘Mobilising national power in a competitive age’ | Panel 1

Jason Wrigley, Monica Kohli, Prof. Andrew Lambert and Vice Admiral René Tas
 Moderated by V. Adm. (rtd.) Sir Clive Johnstone

become less aware of its importance, as well as the work of its navy.

This work is not just about ensuring a maritime environment that accommodates trade, but about tackling climate change and illegal migration, deterring state-based threats, building relationships and, ultimately, ensuring that the maritime environment (the vast majority of it global commons) remains stable and open to everyone looking to use it lawfully and sensibly. If the UK and likeminded countries are to maximise their strategic advantage in a volatile and increasingly maritime century, the ‘sea blind’ ought to become the ‘sea sighted’.

Key questions:

- If the 20th century was a ‘continental century’ based in Europe, is the 21st century a maritime century predicated on the Indo-Pacific? What implications will this change have for Britain and other maritime countries?
- Are the maritime powers’ navies sufficient in size and capability to deter conflict?
- How can the UK and its allies and partners ‘focus’ their force posture – as Australia did in its 2023 Defense Strategic Review – on the maritime domain so they can gain better strategic advantage in the maritime century?[7]

The ‘art of admiralty’

One way to overcome ‘sea blindness’ in a maritime century is a sustained discursive campaign of public and government advocacy – ‘seapower messaging’ – regarding the role a particular country’s navy occupies in underpinning its prosperity. This should be buttressed through messaging about the centrality of the maritime domain to the country’s future growth and security, and echoed by other nations where the navy and maritime environment play a similar role. Essential to this is not just the need for governments and civil society to connect the navy with their national identity, but also for the navy to promote shamelessly its work and engagements, both at home and abroad. Enter the ‘art of admiralty’.

The ‘art of admiralty’ is ‘...the sustained development and promotion of a coherent, positive and holistic long-term approach to [a] nation’s engagement with the sea’ and is a concept that previously sustained Britain as a seapower state.[8] In the past, the ‘Admiralty’ played no small part in directing the entire British nation; today, it is difficult to detect within the British State.

The need for a strong navy should not be a particularly hard sell for insular countries whose



‘How connected are the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres?’ | In-conversation session

The First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Ben Key KCB CBE ADC, Admiral Pierre Vandier and Admiral Michael M. Gilday

Moderated by Viktorija Starych-Samuolienė

maritime power often is applied with disproportionate effect. Critics may point to economic woes and the need to prioritise monetary and fiscal issues over strengthening the navy. They may also stress the centrality of a nation’s home theatre, while arguing that any presence across the seas, whether in the Indo-Pacific or Euro-Atlantic, will have little to no impact.

But this is where navies need to assert themselves and promote the work they do in strengthening their home economy, whether in keeping the sealanes carrying food to feed their populations open and secure, or deterring potential adversaries from imperial forays into nearby countries which disrupt global commerce. Take the recent work of the Royal Navy as an example: since HM Government announced its Indo-Pacific ‘tilt’ in the Integrated Review, the UK has established a solid ‘footing’ in the region. AUKUS depends on the Royal Navy, while maritime security is pivotal to Britain’s participation in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and has aided citizens of the Indo-Pacific in dealing with the impact of climate change through administering humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR). The latter point underscores the Royal Navy’s position not only as the tip of the British foreign policy spear but also as a humanitarian force in the Indo-Pacific, and indeed the world. Both kinds of work should be promoted vigorously. Indeed, navies ought to be their own cheerleader.

In the UK, such projection used to be the role of the Admiralty until its abolition in 1964. What is now needed in countries where their navies play a central role in their defence and prosperity is an agency whose job it is to explain and communicate their benefits to the public. This ‘seapower messaging’ ought to become a permanent feature of the educational system for those nations perpetuating it, for pupils from the primary to the higher levels. After all, ‘The choice to be a seapower state only last[s] as long as the political nation [is] prepared to sustain it.’[9] This is no small task, and will require a step-change in thinking among the public and political elites. It should also cross nations. In practising the ‘art of admiralty’ to foster a seapower identity, maritime nations such as the UK, Japan, the Netherlands, France and Sweden ought to work together.[10]

Key questions:

- How do navies across the globe improve their strategic messaging to better convey their relevance and importance to their Government and people?
- Should this effort be concentrated in a single entity; if so, what form should it take?

SEA POWER CONFERENCE 2023

#SPC2023



‘Competing at sea: Naval power and active deterrence’ | Panel 2

Nicolas Mazzucchi, Dr Philip Shetler-Jones, Rear Admiral Ewa Skoog Haslum and Rear Admiral Edward Ahlgren OBE

Moderated by Prof. Alessio Patalano

- What do both governments and navies need to do to foster a learning culture around the maritime domain which educates the next generation about the importance of the sea’s role not only historically, but today?

Deterrence

‘The language of deterrence is coming back’.[11] Geopolitical competition, even confrontation, now spans the globe, from the Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific. The world is more volatile. This fact is noted in the Integrated Review Refresh and multiple strategic reviews of British allies and partners in the last year, such as those of Australia and Japan.[12] There is an ongoing war in the Black Sea, and smaller states in the Indo-Pacific risk having their sovereignty eroded – partially or even entirely – by larger economic and geopolitical forces. This leads to a further observation: that the concept of deterrence must now be leveraged by nation-states in not just a ‘...hard power battle but also a normative one.’[13] For navies of free and open countries, approaching deterrence in the 21st century can be encapsulated in two questions: What is the character of the struggle? And how can navies help nations protect their interests?

Across the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific, priority increasingly is being placed on a stable and predictable maritime environment, underpinned by openness. For a while, this was something respected by most; today it is being openly challenged by Russia in the Euro-Atlantic and the PRC in the Indo-Pacific. Under such circumstances, the task is to resist and deter actions – whether in the form of the assertion of illegal or excessive maritime claims or attempts to invade other sovereign nations – which infringe upon the open international order. This is where the normative aspect of 21st century deterrence stems from: it is less a Manichean struggle between rival political ideologies but rather one over international respect for sovereignty and how the ‘global commons’ should be regulated.

Just as the PRC’s activities in the South and East China seas led to questions about Chinese intentions, Russia’s renewed aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 highlighted the need to uphold an open maritime order. In fact, it has galvanised many free and open countries into taking action to ensure their own maritime domain is secure and that their belief on what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour is heard. A common message around the need to ensure stability, openness and predictability in the maritime domain is emerging, all underpinned by an unflinching respect for national sovereignty. These views stretch from Canberra to Oslo, and should be aligned with the aid of British leadership. This way, when it comes to ‘high-end deterrence’, a unified position will be present which will surely give pause



'Aligning power: Leading by design' | Panel 3

Ian Bowers, Major General Jim Morris, Stephen Lillie CMG and The Second Sea Lord Vice Admiral Martin Connell

Moderated by Emma Salisbury

to any adversary.

Deterrence across the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific will inevitably come in different forms, and will be employed for different reasons. Three recent examples involving the UK include the establishment of the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), AUKUS, and the Hiroshima Accord. [14.] Like the JEF, AUKUS may be a new model for deterrence. It is a 'minilateral' that signals a deeper, long-term investment between partner nations and 'breaks down walls' to deeper engagement.[15] The Global Combat Air Programme between the UK, Japan and Italy has a similar effect and rationale. These highlight the importance of understanding one's own domain and making such information open and available to allies and partners operating or residing in the area. Deterrence as a daily practice should be tailored to each theatre. Methods that may work in one domain may not in the other.

Above all, deterrence only works if an adversary genuinely believes it will be denied access to certain areas or punished in the event of aggression. To be effective, particularly when it is an integrated posture, there must be a common message amongst the actors attempting to deter. In other words, there should be a common theme as to why any nations, and its allies and partners, have deployed forces where they have and have taken particular decisions in an effort to deter. Britain as a nation values open sea routes to ensure its prosperity, and recognises (and where necessary will attempt to uphold) the sovereignty of other nations. The forces intended to deter also must be sufficient to inflict pain on a potential aggressor.

Key questions:

- How can free and open countries across the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres work with one another to create positive feedback loops that enhance the effectiveness of their deterrence postures in both regions?
- What force posture is needed to participate in such an exercise and how can forward deployed naval assets be backed up with appropriate force if required?
- How will these assets intersect with those of allies and partners, in both the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific?
- How should the UK and its allies and partners signal to adversaries that the deterrence system will activate if it is challenged?

Tighter relationships with allies and partners

A theme which cut across the conference was the need for navies, and indeed nations, to work



‘Maintaining a competitive edge: Operationalising technology in maritime warfare’ | Panel 4

Julian Pawlak, Julie Marionneau, Dr Richard Drake, Rear Admiral Rune Andersen and Rear Admiral James Parkin CBE

Moderated by Shashank Joshi

more closely with their allies and partners old and new. The need to foster new relationships where they scarcely exist was also stressed. This message has been consistent in recent national strategic reviews of Australia, Britain and Japan.

The post-1990s were a benign era for geopolitical competition. Free and open nations adopted a rose-tinted view of the world after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as non-state actors became the focus of national security, and multilateralism and distributing aid the focus of foreign policy. As globalisation accelerated, liberal-democracy was seen as the only game in town; if you wanted to play ball and reap the economic rewards of this expansive trading network, a liberal-democratic political system was deemed essential. Increasing weight was attached to a country’s ‘values’ as it began to dictate whether a new – or old – partner was or continued to be palatable. This era and view of the world is now largely gone.

What has replaced it is the reality of state-based competition and, in Europe, outright war. The value of partnerships has increased as a result, but they are becoming more transactional as the older multilateral structures grind to a halt. This changing attitude has seen ‘minilaterals’ begin to compete with more traditional ‘multilaterals’ in advancing change and policy. To be sure, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) remains the main security guarantor in the Euro-Atlantic (something underscored by Finland and Sweden’s unexpected NATO bids), and the United Nations the premier body for airing grievances with state behaviour and attempting to set global standards. Using the British example, ‘minilaterals’ such as AUKUS, the GCAP and the JEF are the real drivers of change in policy leading to real strategic effect. These ‘minilaterals’ may be the future of how nations come together and collaborate, as well as the future of deterrence.

In respect to AUKUS, the underwater vessels of the navies of Australia, the UK and the US are *the* focus of the arrangement. But where should the Royal Navy itself focus its resources and effort in fostering new and deepening old relationships, and how should it do so? In the maritime century, navies have the potential to act as centres of gravity for national policy to align other countries. Navies convene with other navies and forces, such as air forces, in demonstrating capability and intent in their near waters or distant seas. Sending ships to other countries – whether for collaboration in military exercises, urgent HADR or to uphold freedom of navigation – is a ‘...potent symbol of friendship and engagement’.[16]

In the Euro-Atlantic, the Royal Navy has capitalised on its capability and opportunity to lead in the JEF, which has increased in political significance since Russia’s renewed aggression



‘Steel and statecraft in a maritime century’ | Panel 5

Abi Clayton, Alina Frolova, Prof. Jamie Gaskarth and Mike Knott

Moderated by James Rogers

against Ukraine. Relations between JEF nations have deepened as the significance of the force has increased. In the Black Sea from 2014 to 2022, seven different Royal Navy vessels were deployed to demonstrate British interests and uphold freedom of navigation, while Royal Navy experts continue to train Ukrainian personnel. Maintaining a stable Euro-Atlantic is Britain’s primary security concern and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

The Royal Navy has also become more effective in enhancing old and fostering new partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. The Carrier Strike Group deployment of 2021 signalled to adversaries and partners alike the Royal Navy’s reach, interoperability and interchangeability. Relations with Australia have been deepened through AUKUS and a free trade agreement which largely will be seaborne. HMS Tamar – one of the permanently deployed Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs) – has cooperated in naval operations with smaller Indo-Pacific partners, enhancing interoperability. These OPVs are in fact currently the Royal Navy’s main tool for aligning in the Indo-Pacific; their presence demonstrates humility, and a genuine British desire to be a force for good in the region. They have participated in urgent HADR responses and participated in regional exercises to combat IUU fishing. They have also extended Britain’s presence beyond traditional port calls, to countries such as South Korea. These OPVs act as an extension of the British State in the Indo-Pacific, working towards a region that is open, stable and predictable – something regional countries desire – as it has done for years in the Euro-Atlantic. ‘In times of crisis trust cannot be surged’; the OPVs provide the UK and its Indo-Pacific partners old and new with more ‘...political choice for credible response options’.[17]

To shape the future international order the UK will need the Royal Navy to work with others. [18] It is consolidating Britain’s position in the Euro-Atlantic, while extending the UK’s diplomatic and military reach into the Indo-Pacific. By aligning allies and partners behind it, Britain can reduce the cost of upholding an open international order in an increasingly volatile maritime century.

Key questions:

- Which allies and partners should the UK seek to convene and align without sidelining others or exacerbating regional tensions?
- Which new partners should Britain focus on? How can the Royal Navy help deepen relations with them?
- How can smaller states be drawn into alignment? What assets and signalling is needed to convince them the UK is not a fairweather friend?



Innovation and new technologies

One of the biggest challenges facing the navies now and in the future is the need to innovate and adopt new technologies faster than competitors. And it is not just about developing and using technology, but efficiently adapting operations to suit these new capabilities. The use of new technologies may foster changes which will be needed to gain strategic advantage in the new geopolitical environment. Indeed, the ‘careful composition of implementing technology into existing strategic approaches is crucial in upholding the edge in maritime warfare.’[19]

R. Adm. James Parkin offered ‘three D’s’ to help conceptualise and understand the challenges and opportunities ahead with operationalising technology in maritime warfare, particularly artificial intelligence (AI) and remotely crewed/piloted/driven platforms:

- Humans are ‘*dear*’ to navies around the world, and they are also expensive. They should be applied where humans – as opposed to Artificial Intelligence (AI) – are the most suited and their skills best utilised, giving credence to the argument in a naval context that AI will ‘re-place’ humans rather than ‘replace’ them. Humans may make HADR more humane and enhance its diplomatic effect, but uncrewed platforms will be able to assist people in situations currently too dangerous for living bodies.
- Where missions have a long ‘*duration*’, uncrewed platforms should be utilised. It is much easier to have, for example, a 15 hour airborne mission using uncrewed platforms. There are also obvious situations beyond HADR where minimising human risk by substituting crewed platforms for uncrewed is a no-brainer.
- However, to ensure that navies are able to capitalise on these new technologies and opportunities, they need to look at the ‘*demographics*’: fewer people are leaving university technology hungry and committed to helping their country. This is a problem not just where bodies are needed, but for developments in the doctrine underpinning what uncrewed platforms are designed to achieve, something AI or any other technological development will not replace.

Indeed, the last point illuminates the need to approach research and development in this area not in an ad-hoc, but targeted manner. Incentives should match the national importance of the research, and the right areas of development pushed and promoted. There ought to be greater communication between navies and industry for this to be achieved, as researching and developing ‘what the customer needs’ will be pivotal in maintaining a competitive edge in what is an ongoing process. This will also allow for a consolidated voice between industry and

the navy when speaking to policymakers, better advancing change in the direction needed.

Limitations should also be embraced. Innovation and researching new technologies is like any creative process: there will be failures. This underlines the need to foster a leadership culture which accommodates failure. It also underlines the need to monitor and learn from competitors, particularly regulatory developments and what has failed in their industries and why. Innovation and the creation of new technologies will be central to navies having a competitive edge in this maritime century. So their successes, and failures, should be embraced.

Key questions:

- How does navies maximise their talent pool and resources to gain the greatest strategic advantage in leveraging new technologies?
- What technologies should be prioritised?
- New technologies, particularly AI, may also raise ethical questions for navies: who is responsible, or accountable, for the actions of a machine in a time of conflict?

Future Maritime Leaders' Laboratory

Location and participants: The FMLL took place on the Strand Campus, in the King's College London main building. The participants of the FMLL came from a variety of backgrounds. Crucially, attendance reflected a balance among different stakeholder communities, with industry, the navy, and academia all represented. This was to ensure that the participants new to geostrategy were exposed to high quality thinkers, fostering the next generation of maritime leaders.

Objectives: The FMLL had two primary objectives. The first objective was to enable young professionals from different communities to reflect upon some of the core concepts informing the conference's programme: diplomacy, deterrence and innovation. The second objective was to plant the seeds for the development of a community of practice around naval affairs. Crucially, the FMLL set out to operate vertically – by bringing different communities from within the UK together – and horizontally, by drawing from a wider international community of academics and practitioners.

Structure: The FMLL was composed of three phases. The first included a short introductory lecture on the aims, scope and themes of the activity led by Prof. Alessio Patalano. The second phase focused on a one-hour seminar group discussion, guided by prepared questions. In the third phase, the groups reconvened into a plenary session to present their findings and conduct a final exchange about why and how a future International Carrier Strike Group (ICSG) could contribute to international stability. This structure represented a first opportunity of its kind in the context of a professional conference.

Review of discussions: There were several takeaways from the three separate groups. On diplomacy, the group highlighted the importance of reassurance to friends and signalling to opponents. Yet, the more interesting point concerned the need for naval diplomacy to tailor its activities to advance one's agenda by trying to do what others – especially those who are not aligned with a country's interests all the time – see as helpful to them. In that context, naval adaptability is a natural asset. The deterrence group concluded that conventional deterrence needs to be central to the work that navies conduct on a daily basis, and that the ICSG offers a scalable complex structure ideally suited for adaptive deterrence. It was also said that more needs to be done in understanding how vulnerable such a construct is provided the centrality of credibility to any form of deterrence. Last but not least, the innovation group revealed how different perceptions of innovation can depend on one's background. The group offered a very refreshing take at innovation, looking at it as the ability to nurture and retain talent as a prerequisite to imagine where the future might go. The group seemed to agree that people are a key capability in developing a strategic edge.

Lessons learnt and feedback: The plenary discussion that closed the proceedings offered



some important observations from the FMLL. First, running this type of activity as an intellectual status check of what the naval community understands as key concepts around the use and utility of the navy is critical. Across the seminar groups there were incredibly different perspectives and perceptions of what diplomacy, deterrence, and innovation are and what they entail. Second, differences in perceptions and understanding did not translate into a capacity to apply these notions in a practical context; there was generally limited understanding of how any of these notions applied to the uses and advantages of a carrier strike group.

- **Lesson 1: Do not Assume Strategic Fluency.** Strategic fluency about what the navy does and how it links to statecraft should not be assumed to be an inherent factor informing young professionals in communities across the naval ecosystem.

A second set of observations leads to a different lesson. Across the seminar groups there was appetite for, interest in, and commitment to, debating these topics. Young professionals in naval-related communities are passionate about what they do and want to understand more about, and participate in the shaping of, how their profession advances the national maritime endeavour. Within this context, it was remarkable how participants were keen to have their voices heard, but they also recognised their own limitations in understanding how best to communicate them as to produce concrete effects.

- **Lesson 2: Nurture the shaping capacity of young talent.** Creating opportunities for different components of the wider maritime and naval endeavour to come together and refine their understanding of the uses of navies is essential to this. Better informed young professionals today plant the seeds for stronger maritime leadership tomorrow. Short professional development courses drawing upon case study-led learning to apply broader skills to policy issues could be a powerful tool to nurture the wider maritime community of practice.

Overall feedback for the FMLL was incredibly positive. Participants have shared their thoughts on social media, and started to reach out to different attendees and organisers. Many have also taken the time to write notes of appreciation for both the method of engagement, and the way in which exchanges were facilitated. The seeds for a wider community are planted. The understanding of the interlinked role of steel and statecraft was recognised. The next step is to continue the momentum.

XV Patrick Blackett

On the afternoon of 17th May there was an opportunity for guests to visit the XV Patrick Blackett which was moored at HMS President on the Thames for London Sea Power Week.

XV Patrick Blackett is the only ship of its class in operation with the Royal Navy. Originally designed as an offshore crew vessel, it has since been re-configured and re-purposed for use as the Royal Navy's Test and Experimentation platform enabling NavyX to rapidly experiment without needing to place excess demand on the operational fleet.



The First Sea Lord's Essay Competition 2023

The Council on Geostrategy was delighted to announce the launch of the First Sea Lord's Essay Contest 2023. We received a large number of high quality submissions from entrants around the world.

The three winners, Cdr. Chris O'Connor, Cdt. Joe Reilly and Lt. Cdr. (rtd.) Tim Dickens VR, received in-person invitations to the First Sea Lord's Sea Power Conference 2023 and were presented with their prizes by The First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Ben Key at an awards ceremony during the Official Black Tie Dinner at Lancaster House on Tuesday 16th May. You can read their winning essays on pages 33-38.



To be considered for the prizes, all entrants had to write a 1,250 word essay answering one of the following questions:

1. What should the art of admiralty involve in a competitive, maritime age?
2. How can navies be used to dissuade rivals and deter opponents in an era of increasing geopolitical competition?
3. With modern missiles and direct-energy weapons, will warships become obsolete?
4. How does a navy that strives for operational advantage to fight and win demonstrate its ethical prowess and pivot around employee experience?

An independent judging panel of scholars and professionals was formed to blindly consider the submissions. The judging panel comprised of:

- Dr Anna Brinkman-Schwartz, Lecturer in Defence Studies and Co-director Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies at King's College London;
- Cdre. Catherine Jordan, Head Royal Navy Culture;
- Prof. Alessio Patalano, Professor of War and Strategy in East Asia in the Department of War Studies at King's College London;
- James Rogers, Co-Founder and Director of Research at the Council on Geostrategy;
- Capt. Kevin Rowlands RN, PhD, Head of the Royal Navy Strategic Studies Centre.

We would like to thank all those who entered the competition as well as our independent judging panel for considering the submissions.

How can navies be used to dissuade rivals and deter opponents in an era of increasing geopolitical competition?

By Chris O'Connor | Gold Prize

In 1906, the battleship HMS Dreadnought was commissioned. An engineering marvel at the time, it completely changed the playing field of naval warfare and made previous classes of battleships and armoured cruisers obsolete overnight. Its advantage was not new technology but using technologies in a new combination that had never been done before. It created such an epochal shift in warship design that the battleships built preceding it were retroactively described as 'pre-Dreadnoughts.'^[20] In the next couple of years a new HMS Dreadnought will go to sea. It will contain technologies that were the realm of science fiction when the battleship Dreadnought was commissioned – leveraging the atom for electrical power and weapons, operating with thinking machines, and using sound and radio waves to detect targets unseen by the eye.

The change of technologies between Sir Jackie Fisher's Dreadnought of 1906 and its namesake two generations later (with the nuclear-powered attack submarine of the same name in between) did not make warships obsolete, rather, it completely changed the perception of what a warship was. Submarines were not considered 'warships' by many in the Royal Navy at the turn of the 20th century – when Sir Jackie experimented with them as he Commander-in-Chief of Portsmouth. Dismissed as 'Fisher's Toys', they were considered 'unmanly, unethical, and 'un-English.'^[21] If this sounds familiar, it is because this same kind of thinking, a fear of the new technology being so different that it is not 'right', is used today to describe uncrewed platforms and other autonomous systems instead of ships operated by stalwart human sailors. The battleships of today are museums and not the capital ships of nations because they were overcome by new technologies and operational concepts. Warships still exist, but they are markedly different.

This historical perspective of maritime warfare innovation calls for a rephrasing of 'will warships be obsolete?'. Instead, we should ask ourselves 'What will make *current* warships obsolete?' That way, we can examine the technologies that are just coming to the fore and begin thinking now about how warships will evolve, and yes, their form and function will not look like anything before.

Modern missiles and Directed Energy Weapons (DEW) alone will not bring about this change. New anti-ship missiles with longer ranges, smarter seeker heads, and hypersonic speeds will certainly force operational changes and necessitate new countermeasures for warships on the surface (and eventually below the surface). DEW will be part of every physical domain of warfare, as laser and microwave weapons will be employed from everything from satellites to Marines on the ground. These weapons will lead to an evolution in warship design to add magazines and launchers for the new missiles and increased power generation for the DEW. These ideas are all rolled into the 'Dreadnought 2050' concept that was publicised in 2015,^[22] but in the intervening years between then and now, a new forcing function has emerged that will cause a drastic rethink about the concept of a 'warship'.

The new paradigm in naval warfare will be triggered by the simple fact that a warship of any size will no longer be able to hide on the surface of the oceans. Persistent multispectral sensing from space with military and commercial satellites already complicate efforts to create uncertainty for potential adversaries. Imagery taken daily of bases and harbours can discern with ever greater clarity the readiness and deployment schedules of navies. This pales in comparison to the ramifications of when these constellations of satellites are aided by deep learning algorithms that will be able to provide daily positions of warships at sea. In just the past year, Russian military equipment aiding the Kremlin in its invasion of Ukraine and a Chinese spy balloon were both tracked by these revolutionary means – satellites from the commercial company Planet feeding their image sets to generative artificial intelligence.[23]

When surface warships can be tracked this way, they will be constantly targeted and will most likely lose the element of surprise. Submarines are safe from this technology, for now. Even if a ship was able to develop some sort of countermeasure to hide itself and its various signatures (to include its wake), modern ships still rely on fuel for their engines, parts for their systems, and food for their crew. A carrier strike group (CSG) or surface action group (SAG) will give away its location simply through the replenishment ships they require to operate. To win the fight in this sensing environment, the warship will not be over a hundred metres long with scores of people onboard, it will have to be altogether different.

A warship is nothing more than a cluster of capabilities working in concert to fight. Sensors, weapons, propulsion, command and control, communications, and decision-making processes all linked together with a common set of missions and its embedded tasks. Modern warships have all of most of these functions physically located in one hull, but they do not have to be. Instead of a large ship that has offloaded weapons and sensors (like an aircraft carrier), a warship of many small optionally crewed systems would replace that big ship altogether. If hit with a hypersonic missile or fried with a microwave pulse, the ship would be able to reconstitute with varied components.

The crew and command structure would look very different, too:

A small crew would embark a ship, or series of ships, serving in a variety of modalities as expert controllers, emergency maintainers, and expeditionary operators...moving from independent expeditionary command with a manned crew, to embarking on a mothership or series of motherships supporting unmanned operations.[24]

These smaller distributed ships will build up to units that will have humans on the loop but will have to rely on autonomy to do a lot of the fighting. In doing so, a navy will be built of units that are closer to an aviation squadron with one commander, whose span of control is over many smaller assets. These together will be the 'warship' that will adapt every time they are employed, as the systems learn from past operations and enemy activity and will swap out with others of different payloads. The evolving capability would be akin to changing the battleship HMS Dreadnaught's turrets every underway – that is how integral these smaller vessels will be to the coherent whole of the unit. There are two benefits to this model; one, the 'distributed force will pose a vast array of interlocking firepower, making it less clear to the adversary which elements... pose the most pressing threat,' and two, 'impos[ing] more kill chains for the adversary to manage.' [25] This way of fighting at sea will be the only way to manage when larger warships will be rendered obsolete by their signatures.

When Sir Jackie Fisher recognised the disruptive potential of submarines he did not care if they were cowardly or underhanded, he only cared that they worked.[26] He had the clarity of vision to examine warfare from the undersea while working on a super battleship that would be revolutionary in its own right. He was quoted as saying 'I don't think it is even faintly realised that the immense impending revolution with which submarines will effect as offensive weapons of war'. The crewmembers of the two submarines named Dreadnought realise this revolution. How soon will we realise the revolution of autonomous systems that will lead to a warship of the future – the Dreadnought after next?

Cdr. Chris O'Connor is a US Naval Officer at NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe.

What should the art of admiralty involve in a competitive, maritime age?

By Joe Reilly | Silver Prize

'All shall be done that can be done without the earthly first mover – money, money, money.'

– Official to Edward Nicholas, Secretary to the Admiralty (1625-1638)[27]

When Alfred Thayer Mahan determined his 'types' of naval officers, he used such labels as 'the tactician', 'the strategist', and, for fighting spirit, 'the frigate captain'. [28] Notable by its absence is any reference to 'the artist'. This is a curious omission, given that Mahan frequently determined war to be the highest form of art. In his *Naval Strategy*, Mahan concluded that while science aimed at absolute certainties, art, 'out of materials which it finds about it, creates new forms in endless variety'. [29] The practice of war demanded the proper use of science. But the direction of war was an art, 'manifold in its manifestations', which acknowledged principles and rules only as guides. [30] For all their differences, Julian Corbett agreed with Mahan, that the exercise of command was an art guided by loose principles. Corbett understood that strategy was 'the art of using national resources to achieve political ends'. [31] Policy, strategy, law, economics, communications – all needed to be understood as a seamless strategic whole, led by a 'guiding maritime principle'. [32] Indeed, much of Corbett's life was spent advocating for this 'British Way', one that projected power without undue commitment, relying on economic strength. [33]

What both Corbett and Mahan are essentially arguing is that admiralty – responsible for strategy and direction – is perpetually engaged in a careful balancing act. To put a more modern twist on these classic authors, modern naval planners must 'improvise creatively like jazz musicians around a central theme'. [34] The art of admiralty in the coming maritime century is likely to require improvisation around two key themes. The first is to continue to support the link that Corbett identified between the City and the Navy. [35] Running a fleet is an expensive business, and so British strategic aims must have an economic rationale. Yet increasingly, proponents of economic warfare are championing the chimera of direct blockade – a reading of history that misunderstands the indirect applications of maritime power. This must be acknowledged, and contested. However, the second – perhaps greater – challenge faced by admiralty in a competitive maritime age is to convince the taxpayer that we are in fact living in one. The admiralty must engage, unashamedly, in an intense program of outreach and propaganda. It must roll-back the sea blindness that pervades society, and pursue extensive engagement with academia, policymakers, and the wider public. To achieve both requires skilled artists indeed.

But what is meant by this enduring link between the economy and the fleet? Corbett believed that Britain historically relied upon achieving strategic impact through control of commerce – 'the navy served the City, and the City funded the fleet'. [36] Indeed, his early analysis of commerce prevention has lent much to the present focus on blockade, embargo and sanctions. [37] Yet few still perceive ships as physical manifestations of 'national prestige and self-confidence', or believe surface combatants remain central to the health of a 'booming economy'. [38] The Royal Navy may have played a widely acknowledged role in mercantilism, industrialisation, and the emergence of a British fiscal state, but such a role seems consigned to history – modern democratic populaces tend to reject the idea of living in a 'garrison state'. [39]

The current narrative suggests the Royal Navy exists only as a 'holistic system' protector. Supposedly, in the economic domain, its actions are limited to disaster relief, counter-piracy, counter-narcotics, and anti-human trafficking. [40] Noble pursuits, certainly, but they amount to

little more than tinkering. Yet if even Adam Smith, that great proponent of free markets and free trade, could advocate for national defence, it should be possible to make the case today.[41] An emergent body of hawkish literature is arguing that we must begin to devise an extensive strategy of blockade to deter rivals, taking advantage of our current maritime 'preponderance' in the event of war.[42] The issue with such texts is that they are primarily designed to attack a peer competitor directly – through SLOCS, embargoes, blockades, and interdiction.[43] This is erroneous, and seeks to apply an indirect strategy directly.

This may seem like hair splitting, but it is an important distinction. Much of this new literature anticipates tactics and strategies employed directly against the competitor. The fight, it seems, must be taken to enemy shores, disrupting their trade at key choke points, closing off their ports. Yet this is a misreading of Corbett and a misapplication of the advantages of seapower. Navies are not decisive tools, to be employed in all or nothing blue water campaigns – they are rightly recognised as facilitators.[44] Britain historically did not defeat its continental rivals with decisive battle, followed by immediate blockade. Instead, it progressively attacked their overseas possessions, using maritime power to create problems down the supply chain. The objective was to present continental hegemony with multi-front strategic problems, using the sea to seize opportunities as they presented themselves.[45] In the coming century, why attempt to target the People's Republic of China (PRC) directly, at great cost and risk, when a far more fruitful approach would be to continuously challenge its influence overseas, with diplomacy underpinned by naval deployments?[46]

In Africa, the PRC has considerable financial and political exposure with little physical presence: unstable governments and regional conflict threaten the raw resources needed to fuel Chinese economic expansion and domestic stability. Disrupting this flow, by leveraging political, economic and military influence on African partners, presents the PRC with complex problems to solve, and reflects a truer application of seapower. Cynics may see this 'gunboat philanthropy' as best suited to a bygone era.[47] Indeed, due to this historical association with 'the coercion of weak states by strong ones', there is a great difficulty in selling such nakedly realist policy to a West so profoundly idealist.[48] But approaching a 'systemic' challenger indirectly, creating problems on multiple fronts far removed from the presumed main theatre, allows for the achievement of diplomatic goals without conflict.[49]

Yet while such an approach may make strategic and economic sense, a battle awaits in publicly championing its merits: and indeed, the merits of naval power more generally. As the late Samuel Huntington, a renowned political scientist, observes, 'if a service does not possess a well-defined strategic concept, the public and the political leaders...will be apathetic or hostile to the claims made by the service upon the resources of society'.[50] Indeed, this separate art, of engaging with 'the swirling and perhaps immutable forces that shift and mould public opinion', is one Corbett certainly understood well.[51] As we acknowledge the increasing disconnect that exists between the armed forces and the public they serve, we would do well to reflect on Corbett's success promoting his 'British way' via a sustained campaign in print.[52] As Fisher's mouthpiece, Corbett eviscerated opponents in 'leading Tory journals' with essays so powerful that they were reprinted in book form.[53] The impact of such output is convincing, and there are contemporaneous examples to emulate.

The Lowy Institute, an Australian think-tank which has increasingly shaped the direction of Australian foreign policy, maintains a relationship with Penguin publishers to produce short, hard hitting, influential 'Specials'. These punchy texts make accessible the work of leading academics, journalists and thinkers, and have made a considerable impact in changing how Australians view their role in the Indo-Pacific. The series draws their lineage from a series of British Specials which, in the lead-up to the Second World War, helped stress to the public the importance of German rearmament, the Spanish Civil War, and Mussolini's Mediterranean expansionism. Each sold hundreds of thousands of copies within months of publication, exercising 'significant impact' on public and political opinion.[54] The use of such a medium for the Lowy Institute is proving to be a remarkable success: it is a model to be emulated in challenging the decline of seapower in the British mind.[55] Thus, while the art of admiralty certainly requires a great deal of strategising, it is evident that to succeed, this planning must be presented to the taxpayer in a digestible way. Before we congratulate ourselves for our solutions to this 'competitive maritime age', it is apparent that the first job of the admiralty must be to convince the public that we are in fact living in one.

Cdt. Joe Reilly is a Britannia Royal Naval School (BRNC) Cadet in the Royal Navy.

How does a navy that strives for operational advantage to fight and win demonstrate its ethical prowess and pivot around employee experience?

By Tim Dickens | Bronze Prize

Ethical prowess is entirely reliant on understanding current societal moral values that ethical systems seek to codify and structure for individuals or communities, and around which are built laws, regulations, and norms. Demonstrating ethical prowess is the success in exemplifying agreed moral standards through the behaviours of its defined community. However, if societies' morals diverge, including the universal core morals of, *Be brave – Be fair – Defer to authority – Help your group – Love your family – Return favours – Respect others' property*, then so too must ethical systems adapt or risk becoming irrelevant to the people they aim to influence.[56] At the heart of ethical prowess therefore is the capability to monitor evolving systems and having the agility to change. A Navy is a community within many communities and being a member of it represents another aspect that builds any individual's overall identity alongside gender, ethnicity, age, regionality, nationality and so on.[57] Recognising and understanding all the different identities of Naval personnel is key. Expecting individuals to meet the ethical standards of a Naval service when sometimes conflicting ethical systems can influence them requires recognising where these conflicts may arise and creating strategies in advance to remove or at least mitigate such conflicts. In this way Navies reduce the risk to the human component of operational advantage.[58]

Whilst ethical systems give any community comprised of many individual identities a common set of values expected of its members, at the same time it makes a clear statement to non-members what another community stands for and how and why it behaves and undertakes activity the way it does. If ethical standards do not meet the expectation of external communities on whom an individual community relies for support, then the very purpose and existence of that community is at risk as support may dwindle. Striving for operational advantage relies on such support for innovation, expertise, recruitment, and crucially, resources. None of these will be forthcoming if the ethics of providers do not match or at least accept the ethics of a Naval Service.

It is widely held that operational advantage against a common enemy, certainly at a technical level, is likely to be achieved through collaborative and integrated military activity.[59] Arguably more so than Armies and Air Forces, Navies have a more distinguished history of integration and collaboration as by nature they are working away from home sovereign territory. Working with allies brings further challenges in ensuring a common understanding of ethics. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) for over 70 years has, not always straightforwardly, achieved a commonality including ethical standards across the increasingly diverse alliance. For Navies to continue to strive for operational advantage it remains vital to understand and influence common and often evolving ethical standards in alliances such as NATO, which itself is constantly evolving. To deconflict any competing ethical systems it is necessary to embrace them and to seek areas of compromise. The risk is this leads to imprecision which remains open to interpretation, however this is preferable to having no common ground at all. To gain this understanding, exposure to and experience of cross-community operations at all levels should not be the preserve of senior leadership and should be promoted as developmental and career enhancing rather than something less valuable than staying within national services. In this way all individuals can experience and share a range of ethical influences to further their overall understanding and thus enrich their service life experience.

Ethical prowess therefore will emerge through both the technical and human components required to achieve operational advantage; these components are interconnected as there exists a constant link between human operators and technical solutions. So how to achieve ethical prowess through each component?

The Human Component

First and foremost, Navies need to recognise the common value sets alongside the diversity of experience and expectation of its recruits, and in each generation how this changes. For instance, those who joined a Navy before the start of this century are unlikely to have been as influenced by the dramatic changes in communications and technologies heralded by the information revolution of the 1980s and 1990s. Today it is the expectation to be able to share personal and work-related information and individually communicate over vast distances with portable technology in a matter of seconds. This has led to a new belief in the power of information, both for security and social reasons. Multiple streams of information and disinformation are now the norm therefore the ethics of such communication and sharing need to be carefully crafted.

There is a far greater emphasis on race, gender, neurodiversity and age equality issues, and indeed environmental issues, than in the past and many traditional barriers have been removed. In contrast, compared to their antecedents today's recruits are also likely to be more individualistic as that has been a social driver for the past 60 years, especially in Western Europe. For example, the UK has for many years been becoming more of an individualistic society and times of wealth and success, such as we have witnessed after the post war years, have spurred a consumerism which has led to increased individualistic tendencies.[60] For any ethical system to be relevant it must embrace these cultural paradigms and not be wedded simply to history and tradition. Today's recruits are arguably born into a global community and have likely travelled more and experienced other cultures far more than previous generations. As an example, today's generation regularly interact with peers all over the world for instance through online computer gaming.[61] This suggests that previous traditional models of 'self and other' are not as relevant and indeed would often not be considered morally appropriate by current generations.[62] Therefore, previous ethical frameworks that consider the 'foreigner as the enemy' have less validity.

The ethics of managing a new and diverse workforce is key to the human component that will offer operational advantage; these ethics must align with broader societal ones or the human component of Navies will be at odds with the civilian communities they represent and serve.

Technological Component

Operational advantage is more traditionally associated with technical solutions. How and where these solutions are procured is also now a source of ethical review. Consideration now must be given to the impact of technology on warfighting, beyond the services' need for operational advantage. Harm to service personnel, civilians and the environment in conflict is even more a significant ethical issue for greater society whether that be the use of depleted uranium in ordnance or the impact of modern sonar systems on marine wildlife.[63]

One of the most significant ethical concerns to be addressed is the de-humanising of warfare by the increasing use of unmanned systems and AI.[64] Whilst offering clear operational advantage to the military, the supporting communities view this area with varying degrees of concern, often worrying that if no human is involved then warfare could be more brutal and inhumane, especially if there is collateral damage to civilians. There is also the impact on the existing military human component in the operation of such technology to consider. Societies' fears are articulated by the plethora of science fiction outputs of post-apocalyptic societies where AI has taken control and is waging war on humanity. The fundamental argument will remain as to who is controlling the machine and how ethical this is.

Conclusion

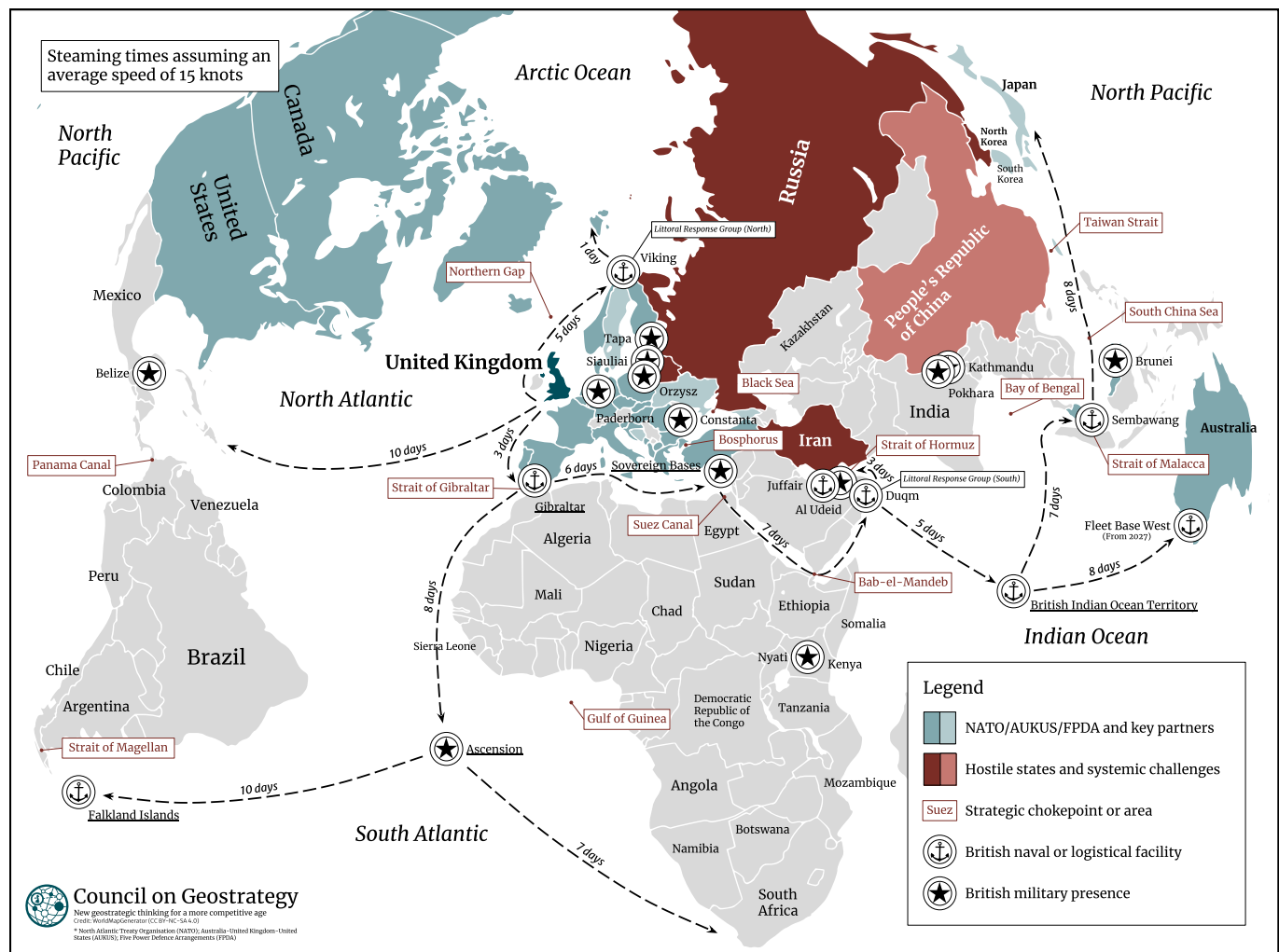
Demonstration of ethical prowess in the management of both the human and technical components of warfare is not inconsistent with striving for operational advantage. However, rapid current technological changes and current trends in societal behaviour and norms puts even greater pressure on leaderships to create ethical systems that remain compatible with society's expectations of operational success on land, air, and sea. To achieve this Naval leadership must remain sensitive and finely tuned to the ethical demands of both its own community and the wider communities vital to support its activities. Therefore, key qualities required to demonstrate ethical prowess and pivot around the employee experience are diversity as it breeds ingenuity, mutual respect as it leads to better decision-making, and empathy because it builds insight. By managing this balance effectively, Navies will achieve operational advantage over the enemy that fails to do so.

Lt. Cdr. (Rtd.) Tim Dickens VR, Ministry of Defence (PhD),

Maps

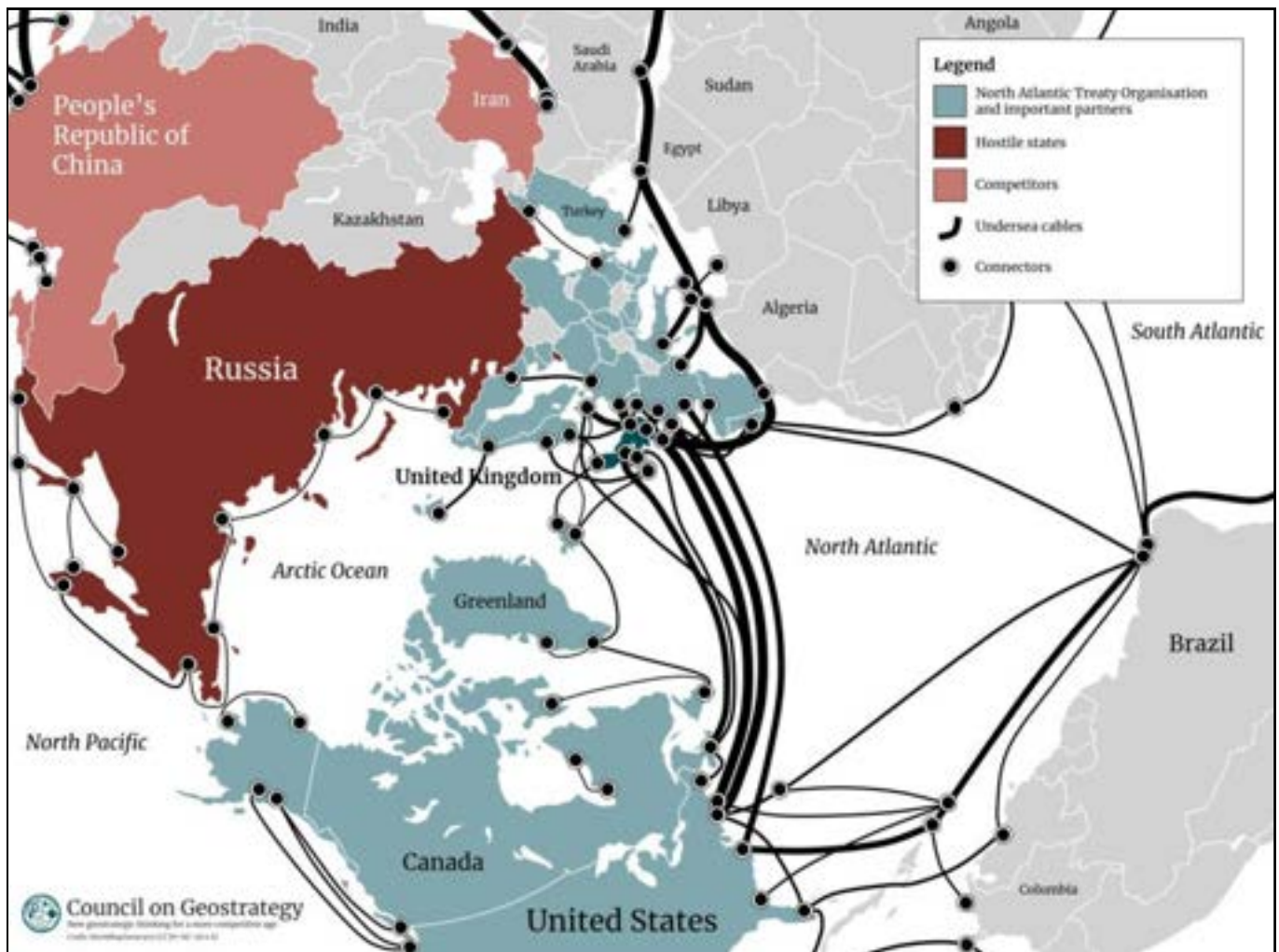
If visualised properly, maps can portray complex information in a way that the human brain can process and understand in seconds. That is why the Council on Geostrategy produces maps to depict geostrategic developments and phenomena, especially from a British vantage point.

Below are a selection of maritime geostrategic maps from the Council on Geostrategy's *GeoAtlas*.



The Royal Navy's global reach

As an instrument of national power, the Royal Navy provides the United Kingdom with extraordinary versatility



Underwater cables in the Euro-Atlantic region
A map of undersea cable infrastructure in the Euro-Atlantic region, depicting the centrality of the British Isles

Word of thanks

We would like to express our gratitude to the Royal Navy, the event sponsors, the team at the Council on Geostrategy and all those who joined us for their support and active participation in the First Sea Lord's Sea Power Conference 2023. Our dedicated team was very busy organising the conference and ensuring it ran smoothly. We would like to acknowledge their hard work and commitment and express our gratitude to the Royal Navy for having the faith in us to make this conference a success. Finally, we would also like to thank our partners – all 18 of them – whose generous contributions made this conference possible.

James Rogers and Viktorija Starych-Samuoliene
Co-founders of the Council on Geostrategy

Our Partners

We would like to sincerely thank the event sponsors for their important contribution in enabling this high-level event and discussions which enable the Royal Navy and Navies of our allies and partners to uphold their competitive edge.

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Endnotes

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