

# First Sea Lord Sea Power Conference

## Speech

Good morning, everyone. I am delighted to also welcome people to this year's Sea Power Conference. This year we've refreshed the format, to attract the widest possible participation: from Service Chiefs, academics, opinion formers, and for the first time our future maritime strategists. I look forward to the discussion panels which have been arranged for today: we will explore the potential for global maritime competition and cooperation, within our connected, but contested world. Most importantly, I would like to extend a special welcome to the family of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry Leach, in whose honour, we heard, our keynote Memorial Lecture is named.

### **A new maritime resurgence**

The timing of today's conference is fortuitous: our Government has invested significant amounts of both political and economic capital in Defence and champions the transformative effect of the maritime sector. In November in the House of Commons the Prime Minister made clear his vision for Defence; "the era of cutting our Defence budget must end – and it ends now."

Similarly, speaking on the flight deck of HMS TAMAR in London in September our Secretary of State said "the global picture has changed ... the static concept of war versus peace no longer applies as we are contested on either side of the threshold of armed conflict on a regular basis ... Our Armed Forces must be more forward-deployed, deterring Russian activity in Europe, combating terror in the Middle East and the Sahel and countering Chinese activity in the Asia Pacific".

And more recently, the announcements in the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper have brought Defence more sharply into focus in relation to current and emerging geopolitical realities. Our Government has signalled a compelling need for modernised, relevant and battle-winning forces. At its heart, the IR has not only reflected the Prime Minister's vision for a Global Britain, but also signalled a maritime resurgence and a very welcome renaissance of British shipbuilding.

I know, this all sounds too gushing and too good to be true, and so, I want to unpack what I think lies behind these changes. Why it adds up. And what it really means for the Royal Navy.

### **Unpacking the Integrated Review**

The IR was comprehensive and wide-ranging. It is about so much more than Defence: Climate Change. Strengthening Science in a technological age. Stepping out beyond the EU. And driving economic growth through trade and globalised services. It is about staying strong in the Euro-Atlantic. Our dominant role in NATO. Staying close to our allies and partners. And a modest, yet decisive emphasis on the Indo-Pacific. It also confirmed the

critical role and importance of our nuclear deterrent in an uncertain world.

The IR returns to a world seen through the lens of classical geopolitics: Mackinder's World Island is confronted by Mahan's World Ocean. As a maritime democracy, we will be able to exploit our distinctive brand as an outward facing, free-trading maritime nation. The IR also offers the opportunity to be bold and innovative. So that, with our allies and partners, we can deter aggression, resist coercion and protect both the United Kingdom and its interests against all comers. It also reflects the British way of warfare: one that exploits the benefits of being as brave as lions and as cunning as foxes, in the use of our people, technologies and ideas. Above all, the IR addresses the key issue of our time: the likelihood of strategic competition with major states and the possibility of confrontation and conflict with peer and peer plus opponents. We should be clear that the view of some recent commentators who imagined only a succession of small, containable conflicts, was flawed. The possibility of state on state conflict is back with a vengeance and more than a few challenges.

### **How it adds up**

Allied with the intellectual and policy frame, we are also developing concepts and innovative ways in which we can employ our armed forces and people so that they can address these challenges and deliver decisive fighting capability. Our allies and partners have picked up the pace and are seeking to modernise and shape their force structures to enable us to compete and prevail in the most challenging circumstances. Investment will be applied where it is most needed to achieve the strategic and operational outcomes that we require, allowing the right solution, at the right time, in the right place. That is why there has been a remarkable level of investment in all three armed forces and in those critical enabling dimensions of Space and Cyber. What has made the difference is that we now have a four-year settlement and additional resources that have enabled all three Services and Strategic Command to be more agile and coherent in their projections of operational capability and acquisition.

For once, there is a very real possibility that strategy can balance ends, ways and means and that risk can be contained. As a result, the Ministry of Defence and the Service Chiefs have no excuses not to deliver. The Secretary of State and the Prime Minister can hold us to account – and there will be no hiding place. If I'm honest, that is both welcome and daunting at the same time.

### **What it means for the Royal Navy**

The Royal Navy and our people are eagerly embracing the challenge and opportunities that this provides. We are acquiring a 50% increase in tonnage between 2015 and 2030. This decade alone will see up to eight classes of ships and submarines under construction. These are levels of investment that have not been seen for almost fifty years. And crucially, along with additional and more modern ships, we will have increased availability, to the extent that the Fleet Commander's deployable destroyer and frigate days double between 2020 and 2030. That is phenomenal.

And while we're at it, – let's kill another myth. We have the people we need to crew these ships. Recruitment is up. Retention is up. We have 1000 more people than we did a year ago. We have a smaller HQ and fewer admirals. We have shifted 15% of billets from shore to sea. And I am committed to making to making the front line the best place to serve.

The Integrated Operating Concept, as set out by CDS last autumn, harnesses the strengths afforded by the maritime, with a posture that is more proactive, forward deployed and has persistent presence around the world. It allows us to exploit the freedom of deployment and manoeuvre that it is provided by the world's primary strategic medium of access and exchange, the sea. Maritime-based and projected forces can intervene worldwide at a time and place of political choice, without the permission of any other country.

Operations with our sister services and our allies and will require even greater cooperation, interoperability and flexibility. And Carrier Strike Group 21 is helping to lead the way. You will hear more detail shortly from Commodore Steve Moorhouse who commands the Carrier Strike Group. The deployment carries strategic and national significance. A partner nation which embarks and entrusts a squadron of F-35B jets with us. On a carrier which flies the NATO flag. With partner nation frigates, destroyers, and submarines in support. Nine major exercises. Multicarrier operations. Over 40 countries to be visited. Over 70 port visits. Stimulating cooperation and trade. Security. Asserting the freedom of the seas and worldwide reach. Testing and proving new capabilities and possibilities. Values. Alliances. Friends. And shared interests. This is multilateralism on steroids.

And we are going to become even more engaged around the world, in addition to our usual stomping grounds of the Atlantic, Caribbean, Falklands, Mediterranean and the Gulf. We already have a Littoral Response Group deployed off Northern Europe, working with our JEF partners. And by 2023 we will have established a second Response Group permanently based in the Indian Ocean. More investment is going into our nuclear and underwater capabilities, where we have, can and must sustain an advantage. And I foresee that the underwater dimension, the only remaining stealth medium, becomes preeminent for hide and seek warfare.

Let me also mention our very capable Batch 2 Offshore Patrols vessels: the greenest warships in the Fleet. Already HMS MEDWAY is based in the Caribbean, HMS FORTH is in the South Atlantic, HMS TRENT is in Gibraltar and about to have the new ships of the Gibraltar Squadron. Soon the final two, HMS TAMAR and HMS SPEY will head west-about into the Indo-Pacific and join up with the Carrier Strike Group the long way round. TAMAR and SPEY will stay in the Indo-Pacific and be joined by Type-31 frigates in the future.

To reinforce our increased Forward Presence we are going to place at its heart our world-class Commando forces. The IR has endorsed the Future Commando Force, an exciting and bold new concept that blends special-operations-capable troops with cutting-edge battlefield technology. And we can innovate and adapt at the pace of relevance because of the ambition, calibre and intelligence of our people. As an example, over 10% of our most junior Royal Marines have honours degrees whilst 40% are educationally

qualified to be Officers. And Commandos provide nearly 50% of all UK Badged Special Forces. That's a striking proportion from a force that makes up just under 4% of all UK Armed Forces.

And across the entire Royal Navy we are devouring novel technologies and innovation. But we have much more to do. We have already appointed a Chief Technology Officer. We are upskilling our workforce to be more tech savvy, including secondments and courses with startups that really challenge our ideas and our notions of technological acceleration. We intend to apply the mantra of 'faster, cheaper and better' – delivering Minimum Viable Products in 6-9 months, not 6-9 years. We have invested in our own software house called NELSON – and NEMESIS as our autonomy and experimentation hub. Hence, Uncrewed Minehunters, Augmented Reality and Jetpacks. We will begin to launch drones from HMS PRINCE OF WALES in September and accelerate the transition to a hybrid crewed/uncrewed airwing. My ambition is that we challenge ourselves to create an air wing for each carrier. Quickly. These really are exciting – and challenging – times.

## **Type 31**

To maintain momentum, it feels entirely appropriate that I can now reveal the names of the new T-31, INSPIRATION-class frigates: HMS ACTIVE, BULLDOG, CAMPBELTOWN, FORMIDABLE and VENTURER.

The names are representative of the Royal Navy's future vision: HMS ACTIVE reflects the forward deployment of Royal Navy ships to protect UK values and interests. HMS BULLDOG recalls our dogged heritage in the North Atlantic.

HMS CAMPBELTOWN characterises the pride we have in our Future Commando Force and their specialist raiding role. HMS FORMIDABLE speaks for herself – and for a fine carrier tradition. And HMS VENTURER reflects the Royal Navy's buccaneering technological and innovation instinct. These are ships which will serve for decades to come, with names which we trust will inspire our people and our nation.

## **Conclusion**

So, this is a demanding, stimulating time for Defence and to be serving in the Royal Navy. We need to deliver on the Integrated Review and justify the investment being made. Ensuring the security of the UK and its interests and deterring aggressive and adventurist states are our bread and butter. But we also have a role to play in supporting and growing prosperity after the economic challenges of the Covid pandemic. Navies follow trade. And trade follows navies. Rules matter. Alliances matter. Shared values matter. We are a Royal Navy that is flying the flag for Global Britain and carrying forward the Prime Minister's vision of what this country can achieve on the global stage. We will be, as the Prime Minister has envisioned, the foremost naval power in Europe, and more... A Global Navy for Global Britain. Thank you.