

Speech: IISS Global Partnerships event 2018

Admiral Sir Philip Jones, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, spoke alongside the Head of the Royal Australian Navy, Vice Admiral Mike Noonan at the International Institute of Strategic Studies on 28 Nov 18.

Introduction

Good morning everyone, and Nick [Childs, IISS], thank you very much for the introduction, for the invitation for Mike [Noonan, RAN] and I to be here with you all this morning, and to everyone here at IISS for facilitating this event.

And a special thanks to Mike. He looks as fresh as a daisy this morning, but he's on a bit of a world tour, taking in London having also taken in some substantial visits in Europe to check on future RAN capability, I'm sure you'll hear more about that later, and then after a trip to Scotland tomorrow to have a look at what a Type 26 looks like, and we'll see the significance of that of course, we're then travelling together to Chile on Thursday night to help them commemorate the 200th Anniversary of their navy. So you've covered a lot of ground as Chief of Navy but for very good reason and it's really good to have you with us, Mike, today.

What I wanted to do is to set the scene, before we hear from the Theatre expert, Mike, on the Asia Pacific Region, about how the Royal Navy sees that region and the way we've shifted some of our posture to reflect that in the last year or so.

RN Pacific Presence

Because it won't have escaped the attention of most of you who are tracking what the Royal Navy does and where it goes that this year has seen a very public return to that region.

The deployments of the frigate HMS Sutherland initially, which also went to Australia, the LPD HMS Albion and her embarked Royal Marines, now followed by the frigate HMS Argyll which is in the region as we speak, and then HMS Montrose, who I'll be on board in Chile in a couple of days' time, is then crossing the Pacific to New Zealand and Australia on her way through the region too; so all of that has drawn no small amount of interest and commentary, both in the region and back here in the UK.

And I hope that comes as no surprise because those deployments have had in the region, I am told, a really tangible effect. Whether on be operations: helping to enforce UN Security Council Resolutions against the DPRK, or the significant programmes of defence engagement they have been conducting right across the region – Indonesia, Vietnam, the Republic of Korea, Brunei, Japan

and of course Australia to name but a few.

But why now? Why has that change of focus to the region come now?

Importance of the Pacific

Those of you who are aficionados of IISS events may have been at their other site in June when, the US CNO, Adm John Richardson, and I spoke at a similar event about the challenges we share together in the maritime domain, challenges that have grown considerably into threats, and threats have both intensified and diversified.

And whilst it's perhaps unsurprising that our combined UK/US geographical focus is principally in the Atlantic area, we made the point that the same challenge to freedom and security on the high seas is to be found in many other places in the world, perhaps most notably over the last year or so in the Indo-Pacific region.

And that's a region we here in the UK simply can't afford to ignore.

As I said at my Sea Power conference at RUSI a few weeks before that IISS event I did with CNO, we were feeding off the UK Defence Concepts and Doctrine Centre's analysis of [Global Strategic Trends](#) which clearly identifies the economic shift towards the Indo-Pacific region; that's already on the way and will only intensify in the years to come

When you combine this with the well established importance and growth of global maritime trade, and the UK's ambitions for an enhanced global trade network once we depart from the European Union, it becomes very easy to see why the Indo-Pacific region will be of such strategic importance to this island nation in the years to come – physically separated from that region by several thousand miles though we may be.

But this renewed ambition for trade links in the Indo-Pacific, where some of the largest and fastest growing economies reside, does rely on influence in the region; you have to earn your place there.

And that's where the key attributes of a navy can come into play, the ability, as one of my predecessors, Adm Sir Mark Stanhope, once put it, to do 'engagement without embroilment', and that can come into play in support of cross-government objectives.

But to paraphrase our Secretary of State for Defence: it's not all about soft power, it's also about being able to back it up with credible, hard power if required. And the way we can proactively contribute to regional maritime security is clearly one component of that.

China

In any assessment of the Indo-Pacific region, the growing role and influence of China will play a major part. China is the most populous country in the world, it's home to the largest supply of natural resources, it boasts the

second largest world economy. So it is perhaps only natural that given their place in world they should look to exert their influence as a world power.

And we're seeing this ambition play out very clearly in the maritime domain as the PLA(Navy) evolves from a coastal force to a regional force, and now very clearly a global force; they had 5 different task groups on deployment around the world last year.

It's an ambition backed up by a programme of Naval expansion that massively exceeds any other country in the world, including the United States. If you look at the scale of their shipbuilding programme purely in terms of tonnage, it broadly equates to launching the equivalent of the whole Royal Navy or French Navy, every year, and they'll be able to do that for the next 10 years.

Combine this with their equally rapid development of tactics and doctrine and it is very clear that they now possess a potent Naval force, equipped and ready to support China's national agenda, and this will be the case more and more in the years to come as they become bigger and more and more capable.

Now there are probably differing, even conflicting views as to how this growth in Chinese military capability is to be perceived, but these perceptions are surely influenced in no small part by their recent actions like the militarisation of artificial features in the South China Sea, and I suspect not influenced for the better.

UK/China relationship

At the national political level, Britain is very clear eyed in its relationship with China, it's a good relationship and one we hope will continue to prosper for all sorts of reasons. And at a Head of Navy level, I'm pleased to say my relationship with Admiral Shen Jinlong, Commander of the PLA(N) is a good one. I visited him in China this year and we had a further meeting at the International Sea Power Symposium in Newport, Rhode Island a couple of months ago.

Now unquestionably there were issues on which we do not see eye to eye, but the open, honest and frank discussion we have over a myriad of issues which affect all of us in the maritime domain are open and genuinely valuable, and I thank him for it.

But at the same time, to again paraphrase my Defence Secretary, we will not shy away from telling them when we feel that they do not respect the commonly accepted rules and norms of international behaviour, the laws and systems from which we all benefit and therefore have a duty to protect.

Specifically, in the Maritime domain, we are committed to ensure that the global commons remain secure and freely available for all mariners who are going about their lawful purpose, anywhere in the world, and we will continue to work to ensure that the laws and conventions that exist to protect those rights are followed.

Return to Pacific

So it's clear that the Pacific is somewhere the Royal Navy needs to be, in defence of our national interests and to promote our national prosperity, but also to exert our influence in the region as we seek to uphold the rules that have underwritten our collective security since the middle of the last century.

But all of this comes after something of a fallow period in the Royal Navy's record of operations in this region, and I'm very keenly aware of that. Following the decision in the 1960s to withdraw naval forces from the region, and the demise of the Far East Fleet in 1971, our last ship, HMS Mermaid, left the Sembawang Basin in Singapore in September 1975.

Since then we have seen a steady decline in the Royal Navy's presence in the region, exacerbated further by the withdrawal from Hong Kong in 1997, to the extent that when Sutherland arrived back in the region earlier this year, that was the first Royal Naval presence in the region for 5 years.

The stark contrast of this year's near constant presence shows that we've now passed that nadir of presence and engagement, and I think we can now look forward to far closer engagement with our key regional partners there, whether it be in the guise of FPDA activity or bi-lateral and tri-lateral relationships such as our burgeoning relationship we have with Japan, and after Chile I fly on to Japan with Admiral Richardson to have another one of our close tri-lateral meetings with Admiral Murakawa, the head of the Japanese Defence Force.

RN/RAN

But whilst we may have been removed from the Pacific for a while, we have not lost our links with Pacific-based powers, especially the Royal Australian Navy. Throughout, our 2 navies have continued to enjoy a significant programme of personnel exchanges, building those all important personal relationships, shared experiences and mutual understanding.

And at the tactical and operational level, our collective efforts in the Middle East in particular have kept our 2 navies closely aligned.

As 2 of the 4 central members around which the 33 nation Combined Maritime Forces coalition has been built over the last 15 years or so, our ships have worked side by side and we have each taken a large share of Task Force Commander responsibilities. And if you've seen in the press in the last couple of days, we've also started to muscle in on the Royal Australian Navy's drug busts as well.

In the course of these commitments the Royal Navy and Royal Australian Navy have shared in a plethora of operational tasking – and no small amount of operational success – be it counter piracy and counter narcotics focussed maritime security tasking right the way through to offensive military action.

Going back to 2003, on the gun line off the Al Faw peninsula during 3 Cdo Bde

RM's assault, that gunline was HMS Marlborough, HMS Richmond, HMS Chatham and HMAS Anzac.

And that Combined approach was far from unprecedented either; 12 years earlier during the 1991 Gulf War, HMS Gloucester and HMS Cardiff had operated in the high end of the Gulf establishing air defence supremacy alongside their Australian counterparts HMAS Brisbane and HMAS Sydney.

All of that is evidence of how closely our 2 navies have, and can, integrate with each other.

Interoperability

I hope we can take it as an established fact that interoperability lies at the heart of successful international partnerships. And that for effective interoperability, how we operate and why we operate is just as important as where we operate and when we operate. So it's about far more than simply our ability for our comms fits to speak to each other – important though that may be.

In this sense, the Royal Navy and Royal Australian Navy are always going to be natural partners. We have those ties that bind our 2 countries together, our common history including being part of the Commonwealth, and we're always going to share near identical outlooks and values, and I would contend that this is especially true in the relationship between our 2 navies. But now we have a generational opportunity to further enhance this Naval partnership.

The decision by Australia to buy and operate Type 26 frigates means that our 2 navies will soon be operating common Anti-Submarine Warfare platforms, the Australian Hunter class working side by side with our near identical Royal Navy City Class. And if you add to that our common outlook on how we generate these common platforms, how we bring that capability and its characteristics into service, it's but a short leap to see that we can find a way to operate them more closely together.

And therein lies the opportunity to set the gold standard for interoperability – in the Asia-Pacific region, in Combined Maritime Forces and more widely amongst the 'Five Eyes' community.

And if the Type 26 has a coalescing effect for Combined RN/RAN operations, it will surely enhance our Anti-Submarine Warfare strategic partnership too, and Admiral Mike and I have signed an agreement today to push that between our two navies.

There's no small amount of truth in the old adage that '2 heads are better than 1'. So the ability to tap into all of the skills, knowledge and experience that our navies both share, to address the future challenges in the underwater battlespace that we know we face, I think that makes a really powerful partnership.

US and Regional Leadership

Potent though this combined force may be, I think it would be remiss of me not to reflect on the predominant Naval power in the Pacific, which of course remains the US Navy, a navy with whom both the Royal Navy and Royal Australian Navy also work incredibly closely.

Given the number of maritime facing nations in the Indo-Pacific region, some of which may be small but all of which are rightly proud and keen to play their part, leadership opportunities abound.

And working alongside the USN, there's no doubt that there's something the Royal Australian Navy can provide in leadership through the region, which is significant; providing the lead for other navies to follow and providing a unifying role within the region.

And I think this is something our 2 navies very much have in common.

Just as the Royal Australian Navy provides that leading role within the Pacific, I would like to think the same can be said for the Royal Navy's corresponding leadership role in the Atlantic and the adjoining seas, bringing together, in our case, principally European navies to work together alongside the US, in our case most often under the framework of NATO.

So the leadership role we play in our respective oceans is a real point of connection for us, and I hope this is something that will allow the Royal Navy to quickly begin to deliver effect alongside the RAN in the Pacific.

I hope that this work, the unifying effect that we can bring with the Royal Australian Navy, can achieve within the region the leadership opportunity that I think is there, and by bringing to bear our mutual close relationship with the US Navy and a host of other navies in the region, I think this can have a powerful effect.

Conclusion

A few weeks ago we marked the centenary of the armistice that brought to an end the First World War. The Royal Australian Navy might only have been formed 3 years before the outbreak of that war, but from the very outset our 2 navies were entirely compatible.

The Royal Australian Navy had almost all its major units operating as part of the Royal Navy's Grand Fleet in the North Sea for most of the Great War, and the Royal Naval Division landed directly alongside the Anzacs at Gallipoli. In the Second World War, 5 Australian destroyers distinguished themselves repeatedly as part of Admiral Cunningham's Mediterranean fleet and over 1,000 Australians were serving in the Royal Navy on D Day.

Through the subsequent campaigns in Korea and Malaya, and right up to the present with those 2 recent conflicts in the Arabian Gulf, our 2 navies have been at each other's side.

It's a partnership steeped in history. But it's also modern, forward looking, and it's hugely valued, certainly on my side, and I look forward to seeing it grow in the future.

So I'm hugely grateful to Mike for being here today and for all your team is doing to lean so heavily in to the optimisation of this relationship. Because as we re-assert our presence in your region I have no doubt our cooperation with you will continue to feature very heavily.