

Speech: Prince of Wales Naming Ceremony

My Lords, Ladies, Gentlemen, Allies, and Friends,

It's been a great year for our first carrier Queen Elizabeth, following her sea trials and Portsmouth docking.

But tonight we shine spotlight on her soon-to-be named twin: HMS Prince of Wales.

A name with a rich heritage.

Through the eventful life of the Prince of Wales's seven predecessors you'll find our nation's naval life captured in miniature.

Between them those ships successfully defended St Lucia from superior forces in 1778, scuppered Napoleon's invasion plans in 1805 and supported the Allied landings in the Dardanelles in 1915.

The last Prince of Wales forced the Bismarck away from Allied convoy routes in 1941 and carried Winston Churchill to the historic Atlantic Charter meeting with President Roosevelt.

A ship of war and peace.

Her commanding officer was Captain John Leach. His granddaughter Henrietta Wood is here tonight.

Our newest carrier name also recalls his Royal Highness. A former Royal Navy Commander who once operated off the Carrier HMS Hermes.

Prince and carrier share the same motto: "Ich dein"... "I serve".

No vessel is better equipped to do so.

Like its sister ship HMS Prince of Wales will travel at speeds of more than 25 knots, range in excess of 7000 nautical miles and, despite dwarfing the earlier Invincible class, operate with a smaller crew.

What a testament to the magnificent skills of British industry.

So let me thank all those, many here tonight, for making it a reality.

From the banks of the Clyde to the shores of the River Torridge this has been a truly national enterprise: six UK shipyards, 700 companies, 11,000 experts, and a vast supply chain spending millions of hours manufacturing millions of parts.

All of you involved in the most complex UK engineering projects ever undertaken can take huge pride and will get your reward when this spectacular

showcase of British ingenuity, imagination and innovation sails the seven seas.

And let's remind ourselves why these formidable fortresses matter more than ever.

PROJECT POWER

First, in a darker world of intensifying global dangers our carriers, two of them, give the UK unique ability to project power.

Nine acres of floating sovereign territory allowing the UK to dictate the terms at a time and manner of our choosing at sea, in the air, over land, and in cyberspace.

We won't need permission or approval from others, we can simply sail our carriers to the hotspot, anywhere in the world.

And with one carrier always available at very high readiness, we can respond any time.

Meanwhile, from their decks, Lightning fighters will fly: a match for just about anything in the sky marking a new era of Royal Navy and Royal Air Force co-operation.

Helicopters too will disembark ground and Special Forces into the danger zone.

For proof of the difference a carrier makes ask Henrietta Wood again.

Her father, Admiral Sir Henry Leach, as First Sea Lord, famously persuaded the Iron Lady that a carrier force could recover the Falklands: and it did.

VERSATILITY TO COMBAT MODERN THREATS

Carriers don't just conduct high-end warfighting at scale.

Second, they provide unprecedented versatility to counter the unconventional threats of the modern world.

We couldn't have dealt with Daesh terror in Iraq and Syria without air strikes from the US and French carriers.

Even in land-locked Afghanistan, coalition air support came from US aircraft carriers in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf.

Now the UK too will have the cutting edge to strike the fanatics wherever they lurk.

Critically, carriers combine hard power with smart and soft, giving us greater ability to provide mobile command and control, situational awareness and analysis, even while distributing vital humanitarian help.

CERTAINTY TO FACE UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Third, our carriers give us more certainty to face an uncertain future.

Whatever lurks around the corner, they give the next generations, 40, 50 years ahead: unmatched political and military choice from the strategic to the tactical.

And they are built to last.

Since our nation embarked on this project we've had four prime ministers, five general elections, and nine Defence Secretaries.

So these flagships will still be sailing in the 2040s, 50s and 60s.

Any future adversary daring to square up to Britain will confront a nation with both a strategic nuclear and conventional deterrent.

WHAT'S TO COME

We have 11 F-35s already with 120 pilots and aircrew training alongside our partners in the US.

By the year's end we'll have 14 F35B with the first squadron due to arrive in RAF Marham next summer.

In autumn 2018 we'll welcome the first Lightning on board QE for flight trials.

By 2019 we'll conduct further trials on HMS Queen Elizabeth with more aircraft, and a comprehensive carrier strike group in tow.

By 2021, F35B Joint Strike Fighters from the US Marine Corps will fly side-by-side alongside ours.

And by 2023, the UK will have 24 F35B Joint Strike Fighters available to embark on our carriers.

SYMBOL OF GLOBAL AMBITION

So our nation's wooden walls are now wrought of steel.

And the case for carrier is iron clad.

Our carriers' significance goes beyond the ships.

They now symbolize our global ambition.

They are Britain's statement to the world.

An investment in strategic maritime power that shows us rising up to the challenge of the time.

Strengthening our ability to work with allies around the world or to alone

when we need.

Our ambition doesn't end there. These two carriers front up our growing navy. We're regenerating our fleet.

Since I became Secretary of State three years ago, I have presided over the steel cut, naming or launching of 20 ships and submarines, from the aircraft carriers, to our frigates, offshore patrol vessels and submarines.

In the last 12 months alone, we have laid the keel of the first Dreadnought, floated out Audacious our fourth Astute submarine, named HMS Forth the first of our five new OPVs, welcomed the arrival of Tidespring – the first of our four new RFA tankers, and cut steel cut on Type 26, the first of our 8 new Anti-Submarine Warfare frigates.

Earlier today I launched a programme to build the first batch of five General Purpose Frigates as part of our National Shipbuilding Strategy, providing for more and better ships, a more modern, efficient and productive maritime sector that can boost our national prosperity across the UK.

And we've just launched a programme to build a new lighter, exportable General Purpose Frigate.

So 2017 is more than the Year of the Royal Navy.

It's a renaissance of British sea power.

CONCLUSION

So, like thousands who recently flocked to the water's edge in Portsmouth, let's take proper pride in our newest national nautical icons.

We're a maritime nation with the sea in our blood.

Throughout our history we've built great ships to great sailors like Anson, Hood, Jervis, Nelson, and Jellicoe; and they made Britain great.

Now Carriers Captains Steve Moorhouse and Jerry Kyd, at the helm of HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Queen Elizabeth, will follow in their wake and once more steer Britain to greatness.