

AIR POWER FROM THE SEA ALTERNATIVE VIEWS

BY

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Introduction

When military readers see the word 'alternative' appear in a title, many are tempted to reach for their revolvers. The author may be expected to do one of two things. Either he will vent views which are so horrendously heretical that the principal virtue of the article is as an exercise in learning what not to think, or the alternative: such an article can be a cover for the writing of truths that dare not otherwise speak their name.

None of what follows seems to me to be particularly controversial within the framework that I am employing, viz. the long view. But it is certainly written in strange times. Because of a peculiar conjunction of procurement cycles. New Labour rivalries (the Prime Minister now wants to use the armed forces all the time, The Chancellor would rather abolish them if he could – and we know what happens to the grass when elephants fight) and the Cold War structure of the inherited Fleet, we find ourselves at a moment which is precisely described by the Chinese sage:

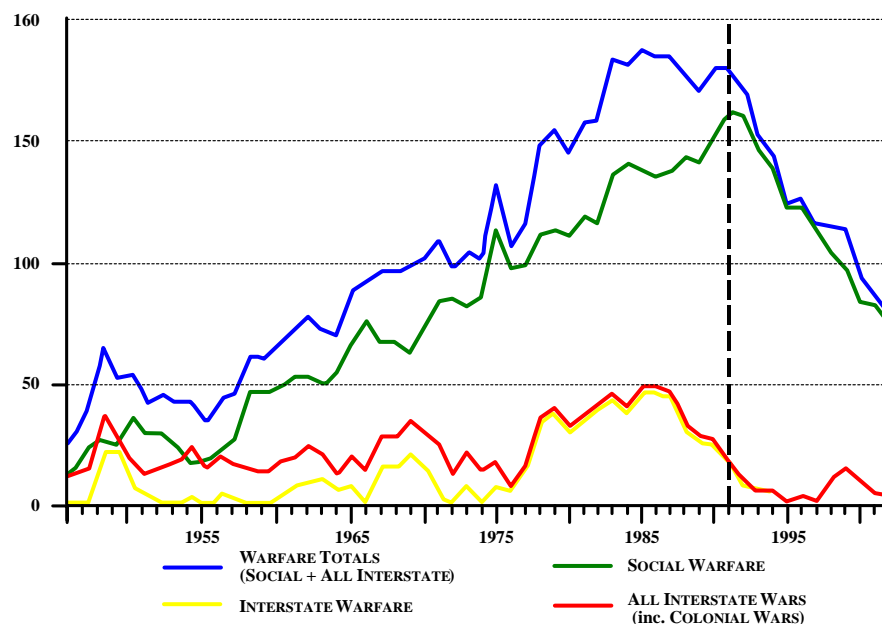
'It is a time of opportunity and danger simultaneously.'

This article will suggest why both the dangers and the opportunities are great.

But to begin with we should be clear about a material sense of what the 'alternative' is an alternative to. Plainly, it is alternative to the possibility of a return to peer competition between balanced naval forces. Competition such as occurred in the great carrier battles of the Coral Sea and Midway in 1942, or peer competition such as the West faced in its confrontation with ADMIRAL GORSHKOV's vaunted, now vanished, Red Navy. Obviously, one cannot dismiss the possibility of peer competition returning.

That future is delineated by the rather clear pattern of global trends in violent conflict that we see in the period between the end of the Second World War and now. From 1945 we saw a steady increase in the number of wars of all sorts, reaching a peak of 180 a year in the mid-1980s. These were overwhelming societal wars (civil wars), which peaked in 1991 at 155 simultaneous conflicts in progress. Interstate warfare, including colonial wars, did not occur for most of the Cold War except as proxy conflicts as part of the Great Power confrontation. That was hardly surprising. They were the two sides of the same nuclear coin: for nuclear stand-off had a dampening effect on interstate warfare, but was – in consequence – a stimulant to much of the proxy war of that era. There was a rise of interstate war in the 1980s; but already by the late 1980s the trend was decidedly downwards. The single most striking fact to observe is that, year-on-year since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, we have seen a steady decline in violent conflicts of all sorts around the world. The decade of the interregnum

which followed the implosion of the USSR, saw a drop from over 150 wars a year to around 80, of which the great majority were civil wars.



GLOBAL TRENDS IN VIOLENT CONFLICT – 1946-2002

This trend is one of the three determining background conditions within which any discussion of the future of naval air power must be situated. It tells us something important about the likelihood of the types of conflicts in which the United Kingdom might find itself involved in one way or another, and, as this article will explain in its last third, these observations should translate into some pretty precise indicators about priorities and forms of force required under an effects-based approach to strategy and force planning.

The second driving determinant comes from recognition that we are now passing through the transition from the doubts of the period of the interregnum that followed the collapse of the *USSR* into a much clearer pattern of what the 21st century will look like. It is (for those who enjoy *The Lord of the Rings*) like the moment of the passing of the Age of Middle Earth.

There are four decreasingly controversial observations, which frame this moment. The first is that we observe the advancing collapse of the post-colonial state settlement that was made at the end of the Second World War in much of the Poor World. In a word, we have to swallow the unpalatable truth that the working assumption of the system of states as understood two generations ago, namely that the state would care for, protect and look after its citizens, is no longer reliable. The most important report to be produced by the United Nations since 1945 has just been published. Kofi ANNAN's High Level Panel on *Threats, Challenges and Change* makes the point bluntly:

'.... It cannot be assumed that every state will always be able, or willing, to meet its responsibility to protect its own peoples and not to harm its neighbours.'

'R2P' — the ugly shorthand for the mission of the Responsibility to Protect people whose human rights are under threat — is one of which we will see much more below.

Secondly, we may observe the draining of power simultaneously from all three of the remaining multilateral institutions which were created at that mid-20th century moment. NATO continues to be a useful talking shop, but is no longer the forum in which the key decisions about the deployment of force by coalitions of those able and willing to use it are taken. The United States accidentally assassinated it when it failed to take up the Article V offer made immediately after the 9/11 attacks.

As a result of a series of other, earlier accidents the 'European Union' is also clearly entering its latter days. This is because of the sudden acceleration of the 'project' of federal union (the relentless increase in the scope of the *aquis communautaire*, the premature introduction of the euro; the over-reaching federal constitution, etc.), caused principally by France in the 1990s as a counter-balancing reaction to the German reassertion of power in foreign policy during the death of Yugoslavia. There has been a steady leaching of legitimacy from the 'Union', which has increased considerably in recent years across all parts of Europe; and the recent enlargement and prospective inclusion of Turkey will in any case make the central federal ambition impossible to sustain. All the spin doctors in the world are no more likely to be successful at reversing this tide than was King CANUTE.

The United Nations, as just noted, will spend 2005 contemplating the trenchant reform recommendations of ANNAN's High Level Panel. Of the three, it looks the most likely to have longevity and legitimacy as we move forward. In each case, these multilateral institutions retain power, of course; but that residue is being profoundly transformed.

Thirdly, we recognize the arrival of the American imperial moment: a mixture of 'hard' and 'soft' power that we have not seen since the AUGUSTINE phase of the Roman Empire. That moment arrived and expressed itself militarily in two glittering victories, first in Afghanistan and then with the removal of Saddam HUSSEIN. But from the moment that the statue fell in Baghdad, we saw American options beginning to be constrained and compromised by the incompetence with which the Department of Defense botched the exploitation of the removal of Saddam. The imperial moment continues, because the underlying determinants of power are not changed; but its future trajectory is obscure. A good indication of this is to be found in the *2020 Study* published in January 2005 by the National Intelligence Council of the CIA, which is striking for the degree to which it foresees a future in which America's power conversations are likely to be more with India and China than with Europe or Russia.

This leads to the fourth characteristic of the passing of the Age of Middle Earth. It is inscribed in the demographics of the modern world. By far the most dramatic feature of contemporary population dynamics is not of a 'population bomb', but the unexpected reverse. A historically unprecedented collapse of fertility is occurring, for quite different reasons, in Russia and in Europe. It is scarcely an exaggeration to suggest that the death of Russia is now foretold in its demographic profile looking towards the middle of the 21st century. So, too, is the fading of Europe's power and Europe's ideologies. It is ironic that Socialism has been rendered unviable in Europe not as a result of some epic battle of ideologies but simply as a consequence of what Europeans do (or, more to the point, don't do) in the bedroom. The demographically fading powers stand in stark contrast to the demographic superpowers, China and India, which seem likely now to rise in other aspects of power, also. This is especially because, as the smoke from the Twin

Towers has cleared, it has become increasingly evident that the single most important geo-political consequence of 9/11 was its termination of the abrupt deterioration in Sino-American relations, which was occurring at that time (conflicts threatened over the Taiwan Straits, the spy plane crisis etc.) and its replacement by a strategic and economic alliance.

Geopolitics provides a good prism through which to view this new age. Halford MACKINDER's 1904 observation that the geographical pivot of history lay in the potential for conflict between whichever was the dominant sea power (then Britain, now the US) and whichever was the land power dominating the Eurasian heartland (Germany or Russia: Tsarist Russia, Imperial or Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia for a spell after 1944, then increasingly Germany again during the 'EU' phase, now prospectively PUTIN's new ploy, to advance through energy blackmail), was apt for the last century. Our strategic context is more complicated. It is set not only by that continuing competition, with China and India entering the equation in the Eurasian Rimland, but also by the existence of what the French geopolitician Gerard CHALIAND has named the 'ring of underdevelopment and poverty', which swings through the tropical latitudes around the planet.

From a maritime point-of-view, a contemporary geopolitics should also identify the emergence during the last 60 years of a developed southern ring, which is linked to the dominant sea power. The most important part of this, by far, is found in Australia and New Zealand. Both countries are part of the 'anglosphere'. They are intimate members of the intelligence special relationship, which has, defacto, replaced NATO as the decision-making forum for the deployment of military power. Australia is more powerful in international affairs now than it has ever been at any stage in its history. That ring also touches countries which have potential, but which are at present confounded. South Africa may have a sensitive and important maritime role as in the next decade strategic attention turns to the exploitation of off-shore West African oil. Equally, once Brazil and Argentina emerge from their current economic crises, there is reason to expect that this developed southern maritime ring will girdle the planet.

What frameworks may we, therefore, judge to be likely within which operationally competent military forces may be expected to operate? This is the third necessary context-setting parameter, which we must identify in order to answer the more detailed questions about the roles of naval air power. Here too we can see four specific points established by recent events:

1. It looks unlikely that a country like the UK will be conducting complex, opposed multilateral operations in a context where command has been ceded to a multilateral agency. Frankly, the prospect of UN operational command died on the night of 7 May 2000 when a small handful of British soldiers at the aptly-named village of Waterloo outside Freetown in Sierra Leone succeeded in causing soldiers of the UNAMSIL force to stay at their posts long enough for the British spearhead battalion to land at Lungi airport the next morning and then to begin the rescue both of that country and of the reputation of the UN. Operation PALLISER is an important case study for our purposes, to which I shall return below.
2. We may also, with moderate confidence, think that the prospects of subcontracting mandates from the Security Council given to a group of major states, such as occurred with Resolution 678 and the first Gulf War, is much less likely. That is a consequence of the debacle over the obscuring of the mandate for the second Gulf Operation (Resolution 1441). Mandates for smaller operations, particularly

those under R2P, are to be expected; the point here is about major action.

3. As already observed above, we should probably not expect to see formal alliances acting formally. NATO was not used in the lead in the last two principal operations. The European Union is incapable of technical co-ordination, of an agreed concept of operation or of agreement on a common set of foreign policy objectives. The strategic interests of Europe's two most militarily competent States today, Britain and France, have become as irreconcilably opposed since 1956, and especially during the last ten years, as they ever were in NELSON's day. CHURCHILL got it right: Britain is with Europe, not of it; and continuing efforts to erase the eccentric essence, and genius, of England in the now thread-bare Continental federal experiment will end in tears. The Iraq issue shredded any pretence at a Common Security and Defence Policy. The Asia Regional Forum is simply not this way inclined.
4. Major operations will only occur in the future when the US consents and supports.

Against that background, we may now turn to the three mission-shaping forces, the demands and requirements of which we must accommodate: demands and requirements which pull, paradoxically in different directions, for they are trans-State missions, which require State-bound actions and resources.

Three Principal Shaping Forces and their Maritime Response

Unconditional terrorism

This is the world of Osama. The challenge that is posed by Al Qa'eda may be presumed to be with us for at least as long as the Cold War before it is eventually defeated. In such a battle, nothing fails as successfully as failure for such an enemy's cause; and the record since 9/11 is not bad, although frustrating to convey to the populations being protected, since the sign of our success is when nothing happens. Al Qa'eda's threat to free nations lies in its world view, but not its content. It is not to do with its Islamic origin. The Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan was a deadly threat for the same reason. The threat lies in the manner in which the belief system is held: it is a form of belief common to millenarian movements through the ages and is what psychologists call 'encapsulated'.

An encapsulated world view is one of unremittingly stark choices (in mediaeval Christianity, called Manichaeism). In Osama's world, there is the realm of peace, of the believers (*Dor al' islam*) and there is the realm of war, of infidels (*Dor al' harb*). There is no common ground. One of Osama's most influential intellectual inspirations, the Egyptian jihadist, Sayyid QUTB, wrote:

“Islam cannot accept any compromise with J'ahiliyyah (the chaos of the unbeliever or heretic)...In this respect Islam's stand is very clear. It says that the truth is one and cannot be divided.”

The slogan of his mentor, the founder of Hamas, Abdullah AZZAM, was:

‘Jihad and the rifle alone: no negotiations, no conferences, no dialogue.’

We, by definition, inhabit *Dor al' harb*. For us - infidels in the eyes of the Jihadists - our choices are - simple and they are three:

1. We may convert.
2. We may die.

3. We may become Dhimm. A Dhimm is a slave whose life is spared by the Khalif in return for total obedience to the will of the Khalif.

Thus, if we do exactly what the Jihadists wish, then we may, for a period, not be troubled by them. A reversal of the expected Spanish election results by the Al Qa'eda '3/11' Madrid train bombs would have been seen by the Jihadists as a successful act of 'dhimning'. Likewise, the failure of the Metropolitan Police to arrest British Jihadists outside the studios of the BBC after they had called on the air for the assassination of the British Prime Minister would also be taken as an indication of partial 'dhimning' of the British State.

The maritime requirement which emerges from the war against the Jihadists (a more accurate and meaningful description of our conflict than the looser slogan of 'a war on terror', which is in any case a conceptual impossibility), is set by the fact that unconditional terrorism cannot be deterred. It can only be pre-empted. Therefore, intelligence plus interception is the top priority. This means that every sea container, any small vessel, is a potential threat; and the costs and the inconveniences of surveillance imposed on potential victims are a gain to the enemy.

It means that we need now to move quickly to a global sea traffic control surveillance organization, which will monitor all commercial shipping with the sort of constant precision that is currently used for commercial aircraft. But, on top of that, there is a maritime mission of 'Sanctions Enforcement Plus'. It is already the case that challenge inspections are demanding an increasing amount of time and effort. Yet in all this, for the Royal Navy, nothing is new. It needs only to recognize that it is being invited to return to the philosophy of the 19th century anti-slavery and anti-piracy patrols in this mission. What capabilities we need to be able to conduct the mission is the subject of the last section of this article.

R2P

The second force which shapes the mission requirements, is R2P. One of the most surprising (and in my view heartening) aspects of the 1990s was the rise and rise of human rights in international affairs, to the point that they became a driving motivator of military interventions in Kosovo, in East Timor, in Sierra Leone, in Afghanistan and other places in a way that they were not at the time of the UN's ignominious withdrawal from Rwanda in the weeks before the onset of the genocide in 1994. In his *Economist* essay of 18 September 1999, Kofi ANNAN stated:

"State sovereignty, in its most basic sense, is being redefined ... States are now widely understood to be instruments at the service of their peoples and not vice versa. At the same time, individual sovereignty - by which I mean the fundamental freedom of each individual, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and subsequent international treaties - has been enhanced by a renewed and spreading consciousness of individual rights. When we read the Charter today, we are more than ever conscious that its aim is to protect individual human rights, not to protect those who abuse them."

With these now-celebrated words he placed the principle of the 'two sovereignties' firmly at the centre of the international stage. It was the beginning of a process, which led, in two steps, to the adoption of the R2P mission at the heart of future multilateral uses of force. The first step came with the publication in 2001 of the Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, entitled *The Responsibility to Protect*. This established a basic principle, which was that:

‘Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal wars, insurgency, repression or State failure, and the State is question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect.’

That proposition is, of course, demanding: for it revises conventional assumptions in Article 2(7) of the UN Charter about the unchallengeability of sovereignty.

The responsibility to protect establishes that in certain circumstances when a high and a very narrow threshold has been crossed – the threshold principally of genocide – then sovereignty may become conditional. Interestingly, the International Commission accepted that the two potential triggers of the ‘just cause threshold’ (large-scale loss of life and large-scale ethnic cleansing) might be activated by actual or apprehended threat: in other words, the doctrine of pre-emptive action is not a uniquely American invention. The 2004 High Level Panel fully endorsed this:

‘The emerging norm that there is a collective international responsibility to protect exercisable by the Security Council ... in the event of genocide ... which sovereign governments have proved powerless or unwilling to prevent.’ (Recommendation 55 §203).

The R2P mission has an extensive maritime implication. What it translates into is the mission of strategic raiding. The temporary interposition of a force to achieve a permanent realignment of politics after it withdraws calls for an ability to deploy and support self-contained littoral and access operations in failed or collapsed states. These are classically state-conducted operations undertaken for cosmopolitan reasons. The model for this was Operation PALLISER, the British rescue of Sierra Leone in 2000. But before we turn to it in more detail, it is as well to recollect that, in operational form (i.e. under a quite different strategic remit) the UK has had two major post-Second World War experiences of this type of operation.

The retaking of the Falkland Islands was done at a time when, even having escaped the notorious cuts proposed by Mr NOTT, a great deal of extemporisation had to be undertaken in order to make the operation possible. Its predecessor, Operation MUSKETEER in 1956, was undertaken at a time when the spectrum of forces available was wider and, therefore, rather closer to that which will have to be reacquired in modern form and for rather different purposes in the future.

In the Suez operation, Britain was able to deploy three aircraft carriers (HMSs *Eagle*, *Bulwark* and *Albion*), from which SEA VENOMS, SEA HAWKS, WYVERNS and SKYRAIDERS could be launched. In addition, HMSs *Theseus* and *Ocean* were converted to become helicopter and commando carriers. The Suez prescription was for the parallel deployment of two types of naval air platform, together with troop carriers and amphibious assault ships. It was replicated with increased difficulty and the need for larger amounts of luck in the South Atlantic and much more recently off the coast of West Africa.

The shift from traditional 19th and 20th century sovereign self-interest to a strategic imperative derived from the responsibility to protect, has had an important implication for the mode of operation. This is a consequence both of the regional environments in which such operations tend to occur and of the rising public expectation that military operations be conducted with far lower levels of casualties on both sides than would have been believed even theoretically possible only a generation ago. In consequence, the leading edge in the deployment of force comes to be found much more frequently in CLAUSEWITZ’s forgotten third mode of operation.

All Staff College students recollect that CLAUSEWITZ describes the manner in which, in defensive operations, in respect of a locality, objective or enemy forces, the likelihood is that the best position can be secured by maintenance of flexible perimeters. Conversely in offensive operations the safest course of action is to take the offensive as quickly as possible to the enemy forces. NELSON's philosophy: 'Straight at 'em!' But CLAUSEWITZ describes a third mode of operation in that same part of *On War* (page 198):

"... To take the enemy by surprise. This desire is more or less basic to all operations, for without it superiority at the decisive point is hardly conceivable ... surprise therefore becomes the means to gain superiority but because of its psychological effect it should also be considered as an independent element, [emphasis added]. Whenever it is achieved on a grand scale, it confuses the enemy and lowers his morale."

A common feature of all the major recent campaigns of large and small-scale (for the operations in Afghanistan and in Iraq fall within this same remit) has been the prominent role of information operations and psychological operations at the leading edge of the deployment. Among the different assets which strengthen this third mode of operation, aircraft are prime, especially in littoral and access operations, such as occurred in Sierra Leone in May and June 2000.

Operation PALLISER was the largest deployment of British forces into Africa since Operation MUSKETEER of 1956. It was also the first mature operation of the Permanent Joint Headquarters and the Joint Rapid Reaction Force. By great good luck, the UK was able to assemble a balanced task force in the theatre of operations, quickly, that met the prescription which was established in 1956 and subsequently. HMS *Illustrious* was in a position to be diverted with its JFACC and was on station by 14 May. HMS *Ocean*, carrying an amphibious reaction group and 42 Commando, accompanied by the frigate HMS *Chatham* could also be diverted and were similarly able to be assembled, as were RFAs, which provided the secure and air-conditioned off-shore storage that was indispensable to the conduct of the operation on land.

However, for the early winning of psychological edge, in addition to the embarked aircraft, it was an heroic act of airmanship by the RAF which deployed CH-47 Chinook heavy lift helicopters from the UK to Sierra Leone in 30 hours. This gave BRIGADIER RICHARDS a means by which he began effective psychological operations over Freetown that enabled him to seize the initiative in the psychological war with the Revolutionary United Front, the West Side Boys and others seeking to overthrow the government of PRESIDENT KABBA.

PALLISER was resoundingly successful in saving Sierra Leone from the rebels and also in saving the UN from what would have been the single most embarrassing collapse of a deployed UN force of recent times had it occurred. That success was reinforced by the subsequent operations of September and November (Operation BARRAS – a Special Forces rescue of training mission soldiers who had fallen into the hands of the West Side Boys – and the reinforcing strategic raid that was wholly conducted by psychological and info op means in November, Operation SILKMAN).

What PALLISER showed clearly was that the conduct of a twin-track mission, in this case a visible evacuation of nationals (NEO) buttressing a less declared objective of supporting Kabba and rescuing the UN force and UN reputation, required four key elements to go right.

1. There had to be access to the theatre at a time and place of our choosing, not the enemy's.

2. There had to be the immediate presence of overwhelming and flexible capability relative to the opponent, which, in this case, meant deployed force in theatre within 24 hours over a 3,500 mile range.
3. There had to be an evident willingness to use that force. This produced a persisting deterrent effect that was reinforced by Operations BARRAS and SILKMAN.
4. As already mentioned and too often forgotten, none of this task force deployment would have been sustainable without a secure logistic train, which, in this case, were provided by the presence of RFAs. The same lesson was shown in the Falklands and underlined by the seriousness of the loss of the *Atlantic Conveyor* to EXOCET anti-ship missile attack. This was one of the vessels taken up from the trade, which was transporting heavy helicopters, whose loss made the subsequent attack more arduous.

But none of these requirements being successfully fulfilled alone would guarantee success without the presence of the two other:

1. The conduct of a coherent politico-military command, which, in this case, was national through PJHQ and the JRRF, buttressed by discreet assistance from friendly allies (in this case principally the United States and France).
2. But the key requirement was that there be decisive delegation of authority to the field commander. Had BRIGADIER (now GENERAL) David RICHARDS not been trusted to hold in his hands the threads of the entire political and military strategy, it would not have been possible for him to conduct a psychologically-led campaign with such dramatic success.

'Occanguard'

In addition to the maritime mission derived from the war against the Jihadists and that derived from the rising requirements of R2P, there is a third force which will shape naval requirements in the near to medium-term future. This I will describe as the emergence as the global mission of 'Oceanguard'. By that I signal the exportation into the high seas of many of the principles that are refined through the coastguard mission by maritime states. Essential parts of the sea already belong to somebody or other, but the 21st century now shows us that the common heritage concept pioneered in the UN Law of the Sea (UNCLOS – one of the most successful of the innovative legal regimes of recent times) will have a rising priority in regions that are under no sovereign control. We can see this is two main topics of concern. The first is the growing political recognition that all five of the main pelagic fisheries are under strain. Thus, we have conflict over fisheries increasingly frequently. There were:

- The Icelandic 'Cod Wars' between the British and the Icelanders, which, fortunately for the cod and the Icelanders, the Icelanders won.
- The confrontations between the Canadians and the Spanish over the Grand Banks which, unfortunately for the cod and for everybody else, nobody won.

There are running confrontations in the Indian Ocean, which in recent times has seen:

- The Royal Australian Navy chasing rogue deep sea fishing boats as far as South Africa.

- The Royal New Zealand Navy has deployed a frigate to defend the Orange Roughy at the seamounts where they live from the predations of Japanese fishermen.

The list continues and likely will extend.

Then, in addition, come demands for emergency relief, whether the presence of a frigate off a Caribbean island that has suffered the explosion of a volcano above ground, or more recently the alleviation of the plight of littoral states of the Indian Ocean following the Boxing Day Tsunami. It is already plain that the single most decisive action which transformed the international relief effort in the worst-affected region of Aceh from being dis-coordinated and logistically hampered was the deployment off-shore of the USS *Abraham Lincoln* CVN and task force, most especially its extensive helicopter lift capability. The maritime requirement for these missions is similar and coincides with aspects of the R2P mission also; a patrolling presence, backed by ability to deploy task force levels of capability. This is a further cosmopolitan extension, but this time of the philosophy and capability of the sovereign state coastguard into the high seas environment where UNCLOS and the common heritage resource protection requirement now demands the 'Oceanguard'.

None of this can be achieved easily by medium-sized powers with naval force inventories that were shaped by the demands of the Cold War. Once again, quantity has a quality all of its own. So, we need to find more – and more innovative – ways to put patrolling hulls into the water. But such hulls must have leveraged capabilities. They require networked access to:

- Helicopters.
- Data links.
- Unmanned Aerial Vehicles.
- Remote sensors.
- Boarding parties
- Task Force back-up.

All of that is only achievable if there are real increases in naval establishments and naval budgets.

It means more ships, more people and more money to pay for both. 'We want eight and we won't wait!' echoes across 110 years into a totally different strategic context from that of the Anglo-German naval arms race, but one where the same point about the quality of quantity, is equally valid. The case that politicians should understand is that these are cheap - really cheap - investments if seen as insurances: as preventative measures against large and undefined risks which are arguably much more likely to occur than the probably smaller probability (who can really tell?) of infinitely awful things, which by luck or by design happily we avoided during the nuclear-laced confrontations of the Cold War. There is a much more reliably demonstrable linkage between increased naval establishment and diminution of risk of attack in the war against the jihadists than was the case in the age of Middle Earth.

Lessons Learned: Requirements Arising

The foregoing discussion of the strategic environment, of the three shaping forces, and of the maritime requirements attached to each, suggests that, as (still, just) one of the world's pre-eminent maritime powers, the UK should ideally possess naval forces capable of conducting or contributing to the following spectrum of effects if it is to be able adequately to respond to the requirements set by the three leading tasks identified.

The framing requirement is of a minimum of two 'combined effects' task forces. There really is no substitute for being there; and it is the clear lesson of recent operations that there are thresholds of critical mass below which a point of a capability is very rapidly – indeed exponentially swiftly – blunted.

Each of Britain's future task force groups needs to be focused on a 'mother ship' and her strategic logistic trains, which are the *sine qua non*. It may be possible to achieve supply and support by air and land in some theatres; but the only safe strategic assumption is that Britain must procure sufficient RFAs (and their ancillary support) to be able to deploy independently of the littoral. Only in this way can 'presence' missions – those most valuable and insufficiently well-valued of deterrents – be sustained. The mother ship in question needs to be big enough to provide command and combination air groups; but these are not the driving requirements. The driving requirement is that it should be capable of marshalling the full spectrum of effects that are needed to be applied locally in a context of littoral and access operations. Defacto, this will be the role of the proposed two new aircraft carriers (of which common sense tells anybody that there really ought to be three). Carrier is not really the right name.

The mother ship would be the platform from which fixed-wing naval air could be deployed. Of all the tasks which fixed-wing aircraft flown from carriers can also perform, an all weather ground assault capability and associated surveillance role is principally important.

Secondly, the lesson taught through the history of littoral operations from Suez to Sierra Leone is that there must be a 'full house' suite of rotary aircraft capability in theatre. This means the spectrum from heavy lift through troop carrying to perimeter defence and surveillance and reconnaissance helicopters. It seems to me, as an interested outside observer, that British policy on its future helicopter strategy is particularly muddled. Clearly, we could procure a second HMS *Ocean* but, equally clearly, we need to know what we are going to put on it, how and why.

Thirdly, an interoperable surface off-load platform is needed in each task force. This will provide troop carrying capacity and over the beach landing capabilities where container ports and facilities are not available. That platform needs to be capable of operating across a spectrum from relatively light to relatively heavy off-load.

Fourth, is the need for submarine and surface combatant screening forces, which protect a task force against both realistic and future potential risks. That means that the screening force has to be both above and below the surface. Such units also facilitate covert surveillance and insertion of Special Forces, and the submarine force also crosses a spectrum from these 'light' roles to the 'heavy artillery bombardment' role of TLAM.

Finally, there is a missing capability.

What pieces of this jigsaw puzzle do we have at the moment? First, of course, we have the three small carriers, which, by subterfuge as 'through-deck cruisers' and the devoted effort of senior naval staff who preserved them through the development phase, retained a capability to deploy fixed-wing aircraft at sea at a time when the Royal Navy could well have been deprived of it altogether. But they will soon be retired and so the question of a capability gap returns. All that rather depends on the degree to which people trust the promises of the relevant here-today-gone-tomorrow politicians with regard to the future carrier programme.

Secondly, also almost by accident, the Royal Navy has HMS *Ocean*, in many ways, that has proved to be one of the most cost-effective platforms of recent

years: as earlier suggested, the problem may lie more with the helicopter programmes than with the ship that can deploy them.

Thirdly (and fortunately), the long-running saga of new surface off-load platform capability has been answered with HMSs *Albion* and *Bulwark* and Mark 10 LCUs. There may be much more and more creatively that can be done with these types of combinations, as I shall suggest.

Underpinning all this is the invisible, but indispensable interlocking of British maritime capability into American network-centric systems, giving access to unquantifiable but enormous force multipliers, from access to both strategic and tactical intelligence. It is a force multiplier, which cannot be obtained anywhere else and it could easily be compromised if attempts are made to curry favour with some of the governments of our European continental neighbours by compromising the future of the country's most important and deepest strategic alliance were allowed to continue much further. Systems like GALILEO and FRES only make sense if it is understood that their primary mission is not military, but is to challenge the Anglosphere's intelligence special relationship, and specifically (the French objective) to degrade Britain's capabilities, especially inter-operability with US forces, and hence position as the dominant European military power since Waterloo, as events turned out.

From the British – and actually from the Continental perspective, also – the history of the 20th century should not be too complicated to understand. Threats have always come from the East and salvation from the West. There are no reasons to think that this will change in the foreseeable future, as the first part of this article suggested.

What new capabilities may the Royal Navy be getting? The issue of the future carrier and the Joint Strike Fighter are at the centre of attention. In the recent round of military cuts imposed on the MoD by the Treasury, the Naval Staff agreed to real and near-term reductions in capability at a time when mission demands are all in the opposite direction. That was, apparently, the price of keeping the future carrier in the programme. Like most naval acquaintances and friends, I shall only believe in these ships when I see them on the slipways. However, as this article has suggested, provided that they are understood not to be 'aircraft carriers' and are not justified principally in terms of hypothetical high-end peer competitor conflict, and provided that they and their air systems are kept firmly embedded in the RN/USN joint world, which will be helped by the decision to procure JSF, the case for such platforms in terms of the strategic analysis of this article is simply irresistible.

Secondly, there is the Type 45 Daring Class, which in its nature and logic follows very much a pathway familiar from that time in the later Cold War when the case was made and won for the Type 23s. These will be technologically capable ships, but also expensive ships; and there will not – cannot – be very many of them. The same is true – even more so – with regard to the troubled ASTUTE class of fleet submarine.

All these systems offer special and mostly formidable niche capabilities. But all of them are opportunity/cost choices. In the case of the submarine, a failure to procure – even a delay in procurement – would put in jeopardy the maintenance of the critical mass of skill and morale, which is the essential precondition for keeping a submarine capability at all. So I see the biggest question – and the largest opportunities for flexibility – in the area of a future surface combatant.

This leads directly to the missing capability. What have we not got? What we lack is a networked post-Cold War surface combatant/patroller that is big enough, fast enough, modular enough in terms of its sensor and weapons fits, air capable

enough (meaning of sufficient size to operate MERLIN-size helicopters in North Atlantic sea states) and cheap enough to procure, crew and deploy in adequate number as a force multiplier for the emerging task force mix.

This sounds like a prescription of impossibility. But it is surely an invitation to think laterally? The experimental trimaran design that was attracting the interest of the US Coastguard and which should therefore perhaps also attract ours, is the RV *Triton*. It would be a pity to see yet another innovative British idea joining the long list of those (from the angled flight deck to catapult launch to landing control systems to VSTOL to hovercraft) that go abroad to be fully exploited.

The second missing capability is one which we do possess albeit in vestigial form. This is the capacity to deploy very fast and capable surface interceptors with moderate endurance in combination with rotary and fixed wing organic naval air, as part of the 'presence' mission of task force. The best way to do this was pioneered by HMS *Devastation*, which mounted small torpedo boat destroyers on deck that could be craned into the sea at need. That was 100 years ago. Today, with the entry into service of the new *Bulwark* and *Albion*, we again have the makings of mother/daughter ship combinations. *Albion* has already deployed with 50 knot Norwegian interceptors internally docked. The experience, for example, of anti-piracy and anti-drug smuggling interception in the Caribbean and threat of suicide boat attack of the sort which was successful against the USS *Stark*, all point to the mother/daughter ship formula as one that is ripe for revisitation as part of an effects-based approach to the delivery of force from the sea by a capable medium-sized power such as Great Britain.

The underlying message of this article is simple. It is argued that we are at the moment passing through the decisive transition point from the 'long 20th century' (1789-1989) and the interregnum which followed it into a 21st century whose geopolitics we can begin to discern. In this world we may expect, fairly reliably, to encounter maritime requirements derived from three rising mission priorities:

1. Requirements arising from the war against the Jihadists.
2. Requirements arising from the execution of R2P – the responsibility to protect.
3. Requirements arising from common heritage 'Oceanguard' and associated, broader humanitarian and rescue missions that are likely to increase in frequency with the predicted increase in extreme weather events that is part of the expected pattern of climate change.

These are significant changes to our strategic environment and need to be recognized as such. This article has argued that they should trigger substantial and simultaneous changes in patterns of doctrine, procurement and deployment paid for from enlargement of the Naval budget – not by so-called 'efficiency savings' and other excuses for cuts. The defence of the realm is a primary responsibility of government; so if it needs more money, as manifestly it now does, it should properly be at the expense of lower priority spending of tax-payer's money. The Royal Navy has precedent for such a moment.

The Admiral sensed a change in the weather. His anticipation of the approach of the First World War, whatever the pundits might say to the contrary, caused ADMIRAL Jackie FISHER to recognize that he should recall ships from distant imperial stations in order to rebuild the Channel and North Sea squadrons. He did this at a time when, as a result of the naval arms race of the 1890s, the Royal Navy had just achieved a quantum leap in capability with the deployment of HMS *Dreadnought*.

And what was the point of the new systems and the new deployments? ADMIRAL FISHER had expressed it succinctly in 1899:

“If you rub it in, both at home and abroad, that you are ready for instant war with every unit of your strength in the first line, and intend to be first in and hit your enemy in the belly ... then people will keep clear of you.”

The sentiment might have been well-tuned to an era of imminent war with a peer competitor and be discordantly brutal for modern ears and for our present and likely future context; but it contains an essential truth of universal relevance. That truth was expressed in less fiery language at the other end of the 19th century.

‘The best strategy is always to be very strong, first in general and then at the decisive point.’

(K. von CLAUSEWITZ, *On War*, page.204)

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