

HOUSE OF COMMONS SELECT COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE:

INQUIRY INTO THE ROYAL NAVY: ITS PURPOSE AND NAVAL PROCUREMENT

A Submission to the Select Committee by:

Professor Steven Haines MA PhD LL.M FRSA FNI

University of Greenwich

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY:

Steven Haines is currently Chair of Public International Law in the University of Greenwich.

Of particular relevance to this submission, Haines is a retired Royal Navy officer who served for 32 years until 2003, including as a sea-going Executive Officer, an in-Service academic and as a Ministry of Defence staff officer. He served on most of the world's oceans and his operational experience included including UN Maritime Embargo, Maritime Coastal Security and Counter-Terrorism, and Fisheries Enforcement (as well as joint operations deployments into Kosovo and Sierra Leone). During eight years in the Ministry of Defence (Naval Staff 1995-98 and Central Policy Staff 1998-2003) he was the Principal Author and Editor of the RN's maritime strategic doctrine (*BR1806 British Maritime Doctrine*, 1999), the Naval Staff author of the doctrinal case for two aircraft carriers included in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review (SDR), responsibility for relations between the RN and the Russian Federation Navy (which that time cordial and involving regular staff level talks. On the Central Policy Staff he was the RN member of the post-SDR Strategic Development Study, subsequently served on the Executive Board of the Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre (now the DCDC, or Defence Concepts and Development Centre), was the Author of the overarching strategic doctrine for the Armed Forces (*British Defence Doctrine*, 2001) and was Chair of the Editorial Board of the UK's official *Manual on the Law of Armed Conflict* (OUP, 2004).

As an academic, his research is to do with Ocean Law, Politics and Governance, including Maritime Security, Human Security and Human Rights at Sea, the Roles and Functions of Navies and the Legal Framework for Maritime Operations in peace and war. A former Senior Associate Fellow of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) he is currently co-editing (with retired RAN Rear Admiral James Goldrick) a volume on *Maritime Strategy for Medium Powers*, to be published in 2022 by Boydell and Brewer. He is a Trustee of the *Naval Review*.

SUBMISSION

There is a great deal that I could say in the context of this enquiry by the Select Committee. I will be most interested in what others contribute to these proceedings and in all aspects covered in the final report and its conclusions. I am restricted in what I can say by the length of submission allowed and the time-frame within which it has to be submitted. I do, of course, understand and support the imposed limitations as, without them, Committee

members would very likely be vulnerable to a deluge of prose! My necessarily brief submission will focus on just two areas of interest, therefore:

- The current strategic use of the Royal Navy, in particular the likely deployment of the RN's principal surface assets (its aircraft carriers and associated escorts) in the immediate to medium-term future;
- The longer-term role for major and medium power navies (an important consideration to be taken into account when considering force development issues).

Current Strategic Use

The current deployment of Carrier Strike Group 2021 (CSG21) has quite understandably generated a great deal of interest and has been lauded by both the professional leadership of the Royal Navy (RN) and by Ministers in Her Majesty's Government (HMG), not least the Prime Minister himself. The First Sea Lord and Fleet Commander have both remarked that it signals the largest deployment for the RN for many years and also represents the first substantial deployment into the Indian Ocean and beyond for a generation. The publicity surrounding this deployment and the significance of it will undoubtedly raise a good deal of interest in coming month. I can certainly sense the feeling of pride in the voices of all in naval uniform, from the most junior to the most senior, who have commented on what is currently underway. To personalise it, I am profoundly jealous of those dedicated servicemen and women manning the ships of the CSG; I wish I was with them!

So, as a naval 'veteran' I am of course delighted on one level that the RN is able to project such a positive message after several years of naval decline. When I say 'decline' I should perhaps point out that my own experience of operating in the region to which CSG21 is ultimately deploying was accumulated in the early-1970s when the Fleet was around four times the size it is today and when our presence 'East of Suez', while being drawn down, was still very much in evidence. For me, the current deployment is merely relatively substantial when compared with similar activities during the last two or three decades. Historically, however, it is arguably less than impressive. Indeed, I am somewhat concerned about the message that is being transmitted by HMG and by the RN itself that the UK's naval power is now truly 'global'. This is, I am afraid, far from so and I believe it is presenting something of a 'hostage to fortune' to make claims to that effect.

The RN is a 'medium power' navy today. It is emphatically not a global navy and the fact that individual warships or even a group such as CSG21 can physically deploy into the Pacific does not render it such. When CSG21 does deploy east of the Indian Ocean it will be operating beyond the limits of its operationally effective 'reach'. It will do so, of course, with the ability to cooperate with other navies deployed into those distant regions, notably the navies of the United States, Japan, South Korea, Australia. Apart from the US contribution of assets to the CSG, it is also deploying now with escorts provided by European NATO partners – a very positive development that will certainly enhance interoperability. This is all extremely positive and it is a notable feature of effective medium power navies that they routinely operate in cooperation with others. Nevertheless, it is misleading for Ministers and the current leadership of the RN to make claims about the RN's status that do not stand up to serious analysis.

The very best medium power navies recognise not only their positive capabilities but also have respect for their own limitations. They do not routinely exceed their operationally effective reach and they avoid making claims about their overall capability that, in

challenging operational circumstances, they would find difficult if not impossible to live up to. I believe that the UK is endowed with a potentially very effective medium power navy that is now in receipt of an increase in investment that is all for the good. Nevertheless, over-emphasising its capability and its ability to operate at great distance by resort to hyperbolic rhetoric risks undermining its potential and its effective use as an instrument of policy.

The RN's strategic role against a realistic assessment of its effective reach leads me to the firm conclusion that it should restrict its operations to the Atlantic and Indian oceans and that any deployment beyond these should be regarded as exceptional rather than as setting a precedent for the future.

The most significant reason given for the UK's new focus on the so-called 'Indo-Pacific Region' (a fairly meaningless description of what amounts to over half the planet), including deployments east of the Straits of Malacca, is to present a challenge to Chinese maritime expansionism. Clearly, China is an understandable source of concern and I am sympathetic to a policy choice that leads to the RN playing its role in countering Chinese naval diplomacy. This does not require a deployment into waters adjacent to China itself, however. Indeed, I lay stress on the fact that Chinese influence is being extended into the Indian Ocean, into sub-Saharan Africa and also into Latin America (indeed, by coincidence Chatham House has a webinar next week on increasing Chinese interest in Latin America). This fact presents a very real and substantial role for the RN in both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, both of which are within the effective operational reach of the RN as a medium power navy. My argument, quite simply, is that for a navy of the RN's size and capability, a well-constructed strategic role would see it deployed routinely, and with a well thought through set of realistic strategic priorities, within both the two closest oceans and the Mediterranean. Over time, the RN could easily establish a very effectively strategic role, in naval diplomatic terms, into the southern Atlantic Ocean to increase British influence in both Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, and into the Indian Ocean to focus on East African and Indian Ocean states. In these areas, the RN would have substance and effective reach, something it will undoubtedly lack during more distant deployments east of the Straits of Malacca.

It is worth reminding ourselves of two of the Principles of War – those to do with concentration and economy of effort. Restricting RN deployments in the way I describe would meet those principles, while deployments at greater distance would risk seriously undermining the UK's ability to engage in effective naval diplomacy. The RN will never be able to deploy in numbers to the Pacific to the same extent that it will be able to deploy closer to home. As a medium naval power it needs to play to its strengths in order to maximise its effectiveness in global terms, leaving other more appropriately located allied navies to take the strain further east.

The Indian Ocean requires well thought through approaches from Whitehall. There is an opportunity and a need to become very much more engaged with India (and for the RN, with the Indian Navy) and with strategically significant ocean states such as Mauritius (and the Chagos issue needs to be resolved before China takes advantage of the dispute over sovereignty). There is much to be done in both oceans that will require a concerted and well thought through approach. I am concerned that high profile naval deployments further east are a distraction from priorities that are naturally within the realistic orbit of the UK (and the RN) as a medium naval power.

Longer-term Strategic Priorities

I turn now to longer term intentions. Navies, especially significant medium naval powers like the UK, cannot shift focus and re-order roles, with the consequential development of naval forces, in a matter of a few months. Over time, the conceptualisation, design, build and delivery of naval platforms has become a decades long enterprise. In the early 20th century it was possible rapidly to create a whole new class of capital warships within months/very few years. Today that is not possible. I was myself involved in the early stages of the carrier programme and wrote the doctrinal justification for two aircraft carriers that fed into the Blair Government's Strategic Defence Review in 1998. It has taken over two decades for that project to come to fruition (and it commenced some time before the coming to power of the Labour Government in 1997). Years before, as a young officer still under training, I had served in the last of a class of guided missile destroyers that were first conceptualised in the early 1950s around a particular surface to air missile system. The last vessels of the class fought in the South Atlantic in 1982 and went on to be sold to Chile for further use towards the end of the century. Naval programmes have long lead times and long periods in service before obsolescence. Thinking about force development today means thinking to a degree about how vessels will be used into the late-21st century. Indeed, the two carriers have a potential life stretching that far into the future – a fact that the Naval Staff have been at pains to point out.

The significant level of investment that naval force development requires means that it is essential that those dreaming thoughts today about naval roles, platforms and the weapon systems with which they will be fitted, require to invest serious thought around the likely future roles of navies well into the future. This is both a fascinating study and an almost impossible one to get right. The future is unpredictable and technological development can confound all strategic thinkers. One obviously must try, however, not least because investment in the long term requires some form of convincing justification in the short term.

Of vital importance when looking at maritime/naval strategy is an understanding of the strategic environment. When I wrote the second edition of the RN's maritime strategic doctrine (BR1806 *British Maritime Doctrine*, 1999) I described the maritime strategic environment as having five clear dimensions (economic, political, legal, military and physical). In the years since then, and in the context of my concentrated academic focus on ocean governance and maritime strategy, I have modified my assessment and now consider the maritime strategic environment to have eight dimensions: Political; Institutional; Economic; Social; Technical; Security; Normative; and Physical

Each of those dimensions has an effect on and is affected by the other seven. All have significance in relation to assessments of the naval strategic priorities into the future. Sadly, there is not enough space in this submission to enter into a detailed description of each of these dimensions. Suffice it to say that each dimension has been through profound change in recent decades and this has had a marked influence on the likely tasking of navies in support of national policy. It is no longer possible in my mind to deploy the naval eternal verities of old when assessing the future of naval forces and what they will be employed for. This is a view that I have struggled with in the past. I was professionally a naval officer and, like all of my contemporaries, was taught and digested the lessons learned from naval history and former naval thinking. These old lessons are still very much the material that naval thinkers instinctively refer to when assessing the maritime strategic priorities of governments in

relation to their use of navies. Unfortunately, much has changed, especially since the middle of the 20th century, and in such fundamental ways that we need to assess the utility of navies in the future against a very different backdrop from that which traditionally applied.

What has changed? This is a vital question that needs to be confronted and the answers may throw up substantial challenges to traditional assumptions about naval roles.

Navies traditionally had four notable functions in war and peace that were well-defined in naval doctrine. To summarise these and to indicate their importance today I offer the following:

- **Sea Control/Sea Denial.** It is important for navies to establish sea control in order to provide themselves with the conditions in a geographical area from which they will conduct other activities below. Control and Denial are simply opposite sides of the same coin – one navy in seeking Control sets about Denying it to the opposition
- **Power Projection.** This is about projecting power from the sea to the shore. It has been the dominant function in relation to operations performed by major and medium navies in the period since the end of the Cold War
- **Economic Warfare.** This is about the interdiction and defence of trade. It was historically a profoundly important role for navies during the era of maritime imperial rivalry (around 1600 to 1950). There has not been a major economic warfare campaign since the close of the Second World War and this is a role that navies no longer routinely exercise. Whereas traditionally, navies and merchant fleets had an almost symbiotic relationship, this has simply broken down and no longer applies as once it did. The nature of the international shipping industry has changed and one needs to question such statements that ‘navies follow trade and trade follows navies’. While once this was the case, it seems now to be subject to significant challenge
- **Constabulary/Enforcement.** Navies have long had a constabulary function (the RN campaigns against piracy and in relation to the suppression of the North Atlantic Slave Trade being good examples from the past, with the enforcement of fisheries regulations being a good example from the present.

The first are essentially wartime roles while the fourth has been regarded as essentially a peacetime activity. Here one must acknowledge that the clear traditional distinctions between ‘war’ and ‘peace’ seem no longer to be appropriate, with so-called ‘grey-zone’ and ‘hybrid’ forms of warfare presenting clear challenges at and around the ‘threshold’.

Perhaps the most notable development that I have detected and which will undoubtedly be a controversial point to put to the Select Committee, is the negation of the old eternal verity that the ‘Freedom of the High Seas’ needs to be maintained. There is no doubt that naval thinkers have been convinced traditionally that the Freedom of the Seas is an essential precondition of global economic progress (and the First Sea Lord mentioned it just a few days ago at his annual Sea-Power Conference). It is my contention (which I will be very happy to explain in detail to the Committee if requested), that we can no longer demand the Freedom of the Seas (or *Mare Liberum*, as Grotius referred to it) and that we should instead be moving towards the establishment of what I refer to as *Mare Legitimum* – or lawful, secure and stable seas on which the freedom to pursue legitimate activity is guaranteed by the major maritime powers.

This is a profoundly important issue to consider as we ponder naval roles for the mid- and late-21st century. It will require significant international agreement and cooperation and a willingness on the part of major powers (the UK included) to display and exercise leadership to meet the obligations they must collectively shoulder as responsible powers within the international system. Navies will be crucial in this context and the roles they will be expected to perform will be more constabulary in nature than to do with war-fighting (although an ability to perform in the latter will continue to be an essential component of deterrence).

I have no space for any further points but will be happy to expand on any points already made if the Select Committee so desires.