

Written evidence submitted by Dr Basil Germond

“The role of the military in countering migrant crossings (Operation Isotrope)”, Response to the [Call for evidence](#) (House of Commons, Defence Committee)

Information on the respondent

I am a Senior Lecturer at Lancaster University, with over 15 years of experience as a researcher in naval and maritime affairs¹. I have published two books and in excess of 25 peer-reviewed journal articles and academic book chapters on maritime security, seapower, navies, and the maritime dimension of Global Britain. My response to this Call is based on my academic knowledge of the question and is given in a personal capacity.

Executive summary

- To use the Armed Forces in a constabulary role has both advantages and disadvantages at the political, operational, and financial levels.
- Countering migrant crossings has a maritime security dimension but also a humanitarian one (saving life at sea and disrupting the business model of human smugglers) and navies have expertise in coordinating complex multi-stakeholder operations in the maritime domain.
- The main challenge is the additional pressure put on the Navy’s resources.
- The priority for the Royal Navy is to contribute to Global (maritime) Britain and the defence of the UK. This is especially important in the current, turbulent strategic context.
- Offshore patrol vessels are not key assets for Global Britain. However, in a period of budgetary constraints and geopolitical turmoil, resources shall only be diverted towards constabulary operations if this does not prevent the Navy from fulfilling crucial freedom of navigation and confidence-building operations in other, strategic theatres.

My evidence addresses several questions listed in the Call, with a focus on the advantages and challenges of using naval forces in a constabulary role (counter-migration) in the context of the Navy’s contribution to Global Britain.

1. Introduction: the constabulary functions of navies

1.1. Navies have three functions: military/war fighting, diplomatic/defence engagement, and constabulary/maritime security². Constabulary functions consist in law enforcement activities and good order at sea; they are varied and can include marine environment protection, fisheries monitoring, counter-immigration, search and rescue, counter-trafficking, anti-piracy, and counterterrorism.

1.2. Until the 1990s, navies were usually reluctant to engage in constabulary activities, which were considered as less prestigious and outside the scope of naval strategy³.

¹ Lancaster University page for [Dr Basil Germond](#).

² K. Booth (1979), *Navies and Foreign Policy*, Holmes & Meier Publishers, New York, pp.15-25; E. Grove (1990), *The Future of Sea Power*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD., p.234; MoD (2017), *Joint Doctrine Publication 0-10 UK Maritime Power*, DCDC, Shrivenham (accessed [online](#)).

³ See M. d’Oléon, “Policing the Seas: The Way Ahead”, in G. de Nooy (ed), *The Role of European Naval Forces after the Cold War*, Kluwer Law International, The Hague, London, Boston, 1996, p.143.

- 1.3. Since the 2000s, navies' involvement in counterterrorism and counter-piracy has normalised their participation in non-war fighting operations. However, the extent to which navies fulfil constabulary functions depends on the specific organisational structure of each individual country.
- 1.4. Constabulary functions can be fulfilled 1) by a separate coastguard based on the US model, 2) by the navy alone, or 3) by a variety of agencies/services including the navy, police, border forces, customs, fisheries administration, etc.⁴. In the UK, the main law enforcement agencies/services, which have capabilities to operate at sea, are the Royal Navy, the UK Border Force, HM Coastguard, the MoD Police, and the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency.
- 1.5. In response to a written question, the Home Office recently (17.01.22) stressed that "the UK armed forces already work closely with Border Force in these operations [i.e. deterring irregular migration and breaking the business model of criminal gangs], given their expertise and experience in maritime operations"⁵.

2. Advantages and challenges of employing navies in a constabulary role (not specific to the Royal Navy)

<u>Policy areas</u>	<u>Advantages</u>	<u>Challenges</u>
Political	Using the armed forces (navies) demonstrates political determination, which might produce a deterrent effect	Using the armed forces (navies) attracts public attention, which might create political disagreements, e.g. with neighbours
		Armed forces become involved in day-to-day security/policing activities, which might be perceived negatively by the public opinion
Operational	Navies have expertise in coordinating complex multi-stakeholder operations in the maritime domain	Civil-military cooperation can be challenging; rules of engagement can be complex
	Navies can add value in terms of intelligence and command & control	Constabulary missions might be considered as 'secondary' by naval personnel of all rank
Financial		Risk of overstressing naval assets in a period of geostrategic turmoil
		Navies must be adequately prepared (and personnel adequately trained) for these specialist tasks, e.g. legal considerations, arrest and detention
		A potential duplication of tasks between two agencies/services is not cost efficient

⁴ G. Till (2009), *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, Routledge, Abingdon, pp.314-318.

⁵ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel, Question for Home Office, UIN 105572, tabled on 17 January 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

3. Global Maritime Britain and the Royal Navy's priorities

- 3.1. The 2021 *Integrated Review* stresses the importance of “preventing illegal immigration” (p.83) and “tackling irregular migration” (p.95). The Review states that “the Royal Navy’s Offshore Patrol Vessels, alongside the UK Border Force, will continue to support border surveillance” (p.92) and emphasizes the importance of “coordinated action between the UK Border Force, law enforcement and the Royal Navy”⁷. This fits with what we currently know about Operation Isotope.
- 3.2. However, I argue that the main purpose of the Royal Navy in the Global Britain era is to assure the defence and sovereignty of the UK and to contribute to “British leadership in the world”⁸.
- 3.3. In 2021, the UK has demonstrated its strong commitment to upholding freedom of navigation in the waters off Crimea (HMS Defender incident in June 2021) and the Taiwan Strait (transit of HMS Richmond in September 2021). The deployment of Career Strike Group (CSG 21), led by HMS Queen Elizabeth, to the Indo-Pacific in summer 2021 and the AUKUS partnership with Australia and the US further demonstrate HM Government’s commitment to a Global Maritime Britain⁹.
- 3.4. The Defence Committee has recently concluded that the resources at the Royal Navy’s disposal are stretched and that the Navy “will be asked to do even more with even less”¹⁰. In my written evidence quoted in this report, I stressed that “the concern is not the lack of power projection capabilities (which has been addressed with the new aircraft carriers) but the lack of capabilities to fulfil the lower spectrum of missions assigned to the Navy” (e.g. offshore patrol vessels)¹¹.
- 3.5. Offshore patrol vessels are not key assets for Global Britain. However, in a period of budgetary constraints and geopolitical turmoil, missions and theatres of operation shall be prioritised, and decisions to employ naval resources “should be proportionate to the core national interest”¹².

4. Conclusion and recommendations

- 4.1. Based on the above, I suggest that the Royal Navy can only afford to devote resources for counter-Channel crossing operations if this does not distract resources from its primary defence, freedom of navigation and confidence-building missions in the context of Global Maritime Britain.

5. Suggested question for HM Government

⁶ See B. Germond (2015), *The Maritime Dimension of European Security*, Palgrave, London, p.78; Till, *op.cit.*, p.318.

⁷ HM Government (2021), *Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, Presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister by Command of Her Majesty, CP 403 (accessed [online](#)).

⁸ *Ibid*, p.5.

⁹ B. Germond (2021), “Global Britain and the Search for Collective Seapower”, *The National Interest* (accessed [online](#)); B. Germond (2021), “AUKUS: The realisation of ‘Global Maritime Britain’”, *Britain’s World*, Council on Geostrategy (accessed [online](#)).

¹⁰ House of Commons, Defence Committee (2021), “We’re going to need a bigger Navy”, Third Report of Session 2021–22, Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 7 December 2021 (accessed [online](#)), p.4

¹¹ B. Germond, Response to the Call for evidence: “The Navy: purpose and procurement” (Defence Committee, House of Commons), NAV0004, evidence accepted in June 2021 (accessed [online](#)), para 2.1.

¹² *Ibid*, para 4.2.

5.1. What are the guarantees that if the Royal Navy becomes more involved in counter-immigration operations this will not be detrimental to the defence and confidence-building role played by the Royal Navy in the context of Global Britain?

23 January 2022