

First Sea Lord speech at RUSI Conference announcing next Lightning II squadron

Admiral Sir George Zambellas KCB DSC ADC today (9 September) announced at the RUSI conference the next Lightning II squadron will be 809 Squadron.



Ladies and Gentlemen,

This week - here in London - is an extraordinary week of concentrated maritime focus, with more than thirty maritime nations represented. Starting with this RUSI Conference. Then DSEI. And then the London International Shipping Week.

There is pretty much something for everyone, and so we will be dining from a rich a la carte maritime menu over the next few days. And this RUSI conference has started us off with the perfect appetiser. And, in the same vein, I very much hope to see you at our gathering shortly onboard HMS Sutherland, for something to wash it down.

As well as giving my thanks to RUSI for staging this conference, I want particularly to thank our international contributors for coming from so far and wide – and adding such great value to today's work. The maritime world may well be the 'global commons' - but it is also a source of diverse taste, and you have added greatly to the flavour of our discussions.

Today is an opportunity to acknowledge the breadth of perspectives - some different - some similar - from Australia, Asia, N and S America and Europe, linked by the oceans of the world - and to understand how - quite independently - common maritime themes emerge – and common equipment choices are being pursued - perhaps best illustrated by the UK, China and India all pursuing carrier capabilities, or by the increasing focus on unmanned vehicles in the maritime domain.

My main job today is to offer a strategic overview of the United Kingdom's Maritime Contingency – to complement what you have heard already about training, force generation and doctrine. Maritime Contingency. So what does that actually mean?

Well, Contingency has a variety of definitions, but it simplifies as 'an event that may or may not occur', which seems, very helpfully, to cover most of our options - not least in the current context!

In essence, in our national maritime interpretation, contingency means being ready for maritime use, expected or unexpected. And the value of this readiness is, at its heart, political. And that is where 'Sea Choice', as I call it, fits in. Contingency is all about exposing the value of Choice: from the strategic to the tactical, but always driven by the political.

The context of this challenge was set out by the British Prime Minister.

In a speech Mr Cameron gave in June, just before the recent G8 summit in Northern Ireland, he summarised the UK national ambition by describing the United Kingdom as 'the small island with the big footprint in the world.'

Due in no small part to the formal relationships we have through NATO, the UN, the EU, and the Five Powers Defence Arrangement in South East Asia. And all of these enable effective bilateral co-operation.

In the same speech I mentioned a moment ago, the UK Prime Minister went on to say "We are playing our part to build a world that is more stable and more ordered..." He said, "To ensure that we can keep on playing that part, yes, we made some important decisions on defence."

And those decisions on defence are not just relevant to a national audience. Because of partnership, they resonate in the international arena too.

So what were these Defence decisions?

They are of course those taken by the UK Government in 2010 as part of its Strategic Defence and Security Review. This audience will be familiar with that review.

At its core is what Philip Hammond, our Secretary of State of Defence, described - last December - as the shift in UK Defence's "posture from campaigns to contingency – moving from supporting long-standing, fairly predictable, largely land-based operations, to providing high readiness, highly capable contingent forces, able to respond to the unexpected." A message repeated recently by the new CDS.

This supports the analysis set out in the UK National Security Strategy which identifies a multi-polar, unpredictable environment, with diverse threats - in an age of uncertainty.

And, in that uncertain world, the UK National Security Council has rejected any notion of strategic shrinkage. Quite the opposite in fact. As our Foreign Secretary put it only last week, "Britain must have a global internationalist outlook."

So how do UK maritime forces support that international role in an era of contingency?

Through what I would call 'Sea Choice', because - imaginatively used - maritime forces contribute by delivering agile choice, drawing on established capabilities and relationships. Reinforcing political options, through partnership.

And the cornerstone of successful partnership, which takes political alignment as its start point, is interoperability. Through mutual professional confidence - and interdependence. Sea Choice is optimised by offering a capability that is engaged - and used - and practised.

So, unsurprisingly, we - as an international community of the sea - train together in large number - tens of thousands in our Joint Warrior exercises off Scotland, as you have just heard - all in support of interoperability and mutual benefit.

And that is the default setting for the UK's maritime forces. Put simply, when our ships deploy - globally - they are an engaged force. They are engaged. Constantly working - delivering effect. That's how we get value from them.

Engaged maritime forces are forward deployed, and independent, not dependent on host nations, access or overflight. Please may we use your runway, or airspace, or harbour? These questions do not arise.

In this short Century alone, the UK has demonstrated this in OP PALLISER successfully stabilising Sierra Leone, in OP HIGHBROW evacuating UK dependents from the Lebanon, off Al Faw in the maritime flank and littoral access to Iraq, off Libya in an international maritime partnership.

And providing their 'Sea Choice', the US Navy used a nuclear carrier in post-tsunami support to Indonesia, and the Japanese used BMD ships to provide humanitarian relief following their 'great earthquake'.

Being engaged forward makes practical and political sense. Sailing from the UK make a political statement: not always desirable. But assets forward deployed give a less obvious, but no less powerful signal, of regional commitment - and they offer quicker options. And this allows early decisions to be made, which in turn create both political and military space. Late decisions, or dependency on others, reduce that space.

So positioning and timing is critical in maximising choice. And engaged forces, forward deployed, make sense - and maximise choice. It gives you the initiative - in so many ways: a better chance to understand - environmentally, diplomatically, culturally - a better framework for intelligence - better situational awareness - including through alliances and partnerships, for hard and soft effects.

And with our maritime readiness profile, for almost no extra cost, we're ready: to reassure, deter, contain, coerce, prevent. Take your pick. It's all Sea Choice.

Let me turn back briefly to the three roles that have emerged for the Royal Navy's 'engaged forces' following the Defence and Security Review.

First: The role of Conflict prevention. But, if upstream deterrence fails, ready to fight and win – with a broad spectrum, high-end war fighting capability at a sensible scale. Such as our enduring presence in the Gulf: "preventing the arteries of global trade from hardening", as the UK Prime Minister has put it.

Second: The role of Maritime security. Such as the current counter-piracy effort off the Horn of Africa, or the current counter-narcotics performance in the Caribbean, that last month saw HMS Lancaster make an extraordinary \$150m drugs bust.

And third: The role of International Defence Engagement. Exemplified by the subtle - and not so subtle - role of the White Ensign in support of UK influence around the globe – through a

wide and over-lapping range of effects: military friendship in partnership and training on an enormous scale - in support of diplomatic objectives - in support of commercial objectives.

But always demanding a mature understanding - as I said before - of regional issues and sensitivities. Hence the need to stay around - and not be a fly-by-night navy.

So each of these three core roles play back into and reinforce the Government's ambition – to support UK objectives for a more ordered and stable world, while contributing to the UK's prosperity and growth agendas.

In other words, protecting the nation's interests – the full answer to “Why Navy?”

And Sea Choice also comes from the ability of maritime forces to flex from one of these roles to another. Let me illustrate this, in a short hop from the Horn of Africa to the Straits of Hormuz.

A frigate or destroyer can be involved in counter-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean. And it can then switch quickly from this maritime security role, to a high-end role in the choke points of the Gulf, working in very close proximity and partnership with our very many regional allies.

But to benefit from this choice, this ability to switch from low to high end performance, you need to maintain high-end capability, not just in the equipment, but in the practise, and indeed in the mind of the crews. And so a corvette designed for policing duties doesn't just fail this basic test of contingent flexibility.

The crews themselves are in a different mindset. Both Contingency and Sea Choice evaporate.

In the Royal Navy, we cross-connect the use of the entire frigate and destroyer force - and we have to, because of numbers - and to maximise output. In doing so, we move seamlessly from training on operations, to operations. We move from a high end role, to a simpler mission, and back again. And, at all times, high end training is necessary, on the right equipment, to be ready.

We allocate ships to more than one task, by double and triple counting - because we have to. And we work the crews very hard to make this 'ship chemistry' work.

That is why, set against today's tasks, and the sensible demands for contingent choice, we absolutely depend upon having highly capable units.

The real efficiency of highly capable assets is that they can go in harm's way, and conduct the core of high end tasks, with an appropriate Force Generation cycle in support. This ensures credible, truly versatile and premier league capability.

And, since our Secretary of State has made it clear that he wants us to be the most capable ally of the US, the interoperability we achieve every day in the Gulf is my headmark for our people and our platforms, now and into the future.

As we look to the future, let me tell you what Sea Choice looks like: central to the delivery of choice in the maritime domain, in this era of contingency, is the establishment of a naval task group at very high readiness – what we have called the Response Force Task Group.

Mandated in the 2010 SDSR this task group is a central pillar in the development of the UK's contingent forces. And it contributes to the delivery of the Royal Navy's 3 core roles that I mentioned.

This naval task group is a maritime force, tasked by Defence, which is 'environmentally joint'. So it is capable of operating at sea or from the sea to have effect across the littoral. With its organic maritime air, surface, sub surface and marine elements it is a universal socket into which land, air and joint forces can be plugged.

We prove the concept annually - under the name of Cougar - with one at sea now. But the structure is persistent if occasionally fragmented and virtual. It trains as a task group - ready, forward deployed, gaining knowledge in areas of potential risk. Offering contingent choice. And let's not forget that it delivered in combat – decisively, impressively, successfully – during operations off Libya in 2011.

The Army partnered investment in the Apache at sea for nearly twelve years, and reaped great professional and joint value off Libya. We warmly welcome that - and encourage more of the same. So the concept already has a practical authority in the maritime domain – and within Defence – and at the highest levels of Government.

This is good. But there is still more - much more - to come. And that is really exciting.

Next year sees the rebirth of the UK's carrier capability with the launch event for HMS Queen Elizabeth, the first of the UK's two new aircraft carriers. Once operational these powerful ships – with their 'big decks' - will provide a quantum leap in the capability of this naval task group – they will be a real force multiplier.

They are intended to deliver carrier strike with their embarked joint strike fighters. They will be able to deliver littoral manoeuvre. But their utility extends beyond this – and this is the fundamental, game-changing point. As a very visible, mobile and self-sustaining national instrument of power, they will be able to deter and reassure - to engage and to prevent conflict – to offer political and diplomatic options, as well as military muscle.

The word 'choice' echoes again.

So the current naval task group is by no means the finished article in the current technological, political and social age. But it is a proven concept - actually proven through the ages - and therefore a good basis on which to build.

And more than this. This task group is not just a stand alone capability. It is also a fundamental component of the United Kingdom's new Joint Expeditionary Force. As the Chief of the Defence Staff put it at the RUSI conference in December 2012 the maritime and amphibious components – with 3 Cdo Bde at the core of the latter – "will be at the heart of Britain's JEF".

I echo the sentiments of the CDS. The RFTG is the beating heart of our future expeditionary capability. Why? Because it provides agility, mobility and presence. And choice. Because it offers organic capabilities which permit independence of action.

Because it delivers a spectrum of political, diplomatic and military options. So, without this heart, the JEF will be operating on bypass – immobile, reliant on external means of support to function.

And, linking to my strong message on partnership, the RFTG also lends itself to the integration of our international allies and partners. So we are inviting key partners to connect up with this Maritime Joint Expeditionary Force, to plug and play. Because it generates interoperability, reinforces partnership, and because it provides politically important, military scale.

This year's Cougar deployment East of Suez is packed with exercises with our international partners – Albanian Lion en route; JEBEL DAGGER with Jordan; Red Alligator with Saudi Arabia; Djibouti Scorpion; Djibouti Lion; Sea Khanjar with the UAE; and Omani COUGAR. And, as I speak, staff from 5 nations invited to join the JEF by our former Chief of Defence Staff are embarked on COUGAR 13 – understanding its potential – and shaping how it will train, and generate, and deploy in the future.

And another variation on this theme - a prominent example of international cooperation centred around the RFTG - is the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force. This is a telling example of collaboration between the UK and France - a reflection of the 2010 Lancaster House agreement to increase military cooperation. And the exercise of the CJEF during Exercise Corsican Lion in the Mediterranean last year marked a real step forward in our joint ambition.

So, through an international lens, I see the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force providing a blueprint for international military cooperation with a maritime force at its heart. And - beyond the CJEF - we are also looking for opportunities to internationalise the UK's Joint Expeditionary Force.

As the Secretary of State for Defence said last October: "Working with our international partners is more important than ever before and forms a vital part of our operations, whether countering piracy in the Indian Ocean, protecting trade routes in the Gulf or providing contingent capabilities."

So, let me summarise my attitude to the shift to contingency, and its impact in the maritime domain.

Well, any government needs options – and alternatives where, as now, the way is less clear - in support of its political ambitions. And we are an instrument in delivering that, not least because the Prime Minister also recognised in his pre-G8 speech that the country's prosperity is won in far flung places – and maritime forces help to reinforce and secure that message too.

So my sense is one of rising maritime authority, responsibility and opportunity. Others elsewhere have spoken of this being the 'century of the ocean'. Perhaps it's a little early for that, but the prospects look reasonable.

In a national setting, the key to unlocking those opportunities in the maritime domain is through the joint approach. I sincerely believe that. Why? Because it enhances the individual values of the Navy, the Army and the Air Force – and Defence.

Put simply, I see things through a defence lens, not a naval lens. So that is my starting point.

That sense of joint endeavour is embodied in the fifth generation Joint Strike Fighters which will be operated by both the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. I am energised by the prospect of Air Force pilots operating alongside their Fleet Air Arm colleagues - from the astonishing new aircraft carriers - as part of the Joint Expeditionary Force - with the RFTG as its beating heart.

And on that subject, you will recall that the Chief of the Air Staff announced in July that the first operational Joint Strike Fighter squadron will carry the numberplate of 617 Squadron – continuing the history and tradition of the famous RAF squadron that launched the daring ‘Dambusters’ raid. I thought it was a good choice, because 617 did some of their best work over the water, and so they will do again.

And he also announced at that time that the second JSF Squadron will be a Naval Air Squadron manned by Royal Navy and Royal Air Force personnel. Well today I am delighted to announce that the next Lightning II squadron, when it forms, will be 809 Squadron.

This squadron number is a golden thread which weaves its way through the proud history of carrier strike - from the Second World War - through to the Buccaneers flying from the post-war HMS Ark Royal - to the iconic Sea Harriers which served with such distinction in the Falklands in 1982. It could not be a more fitting squadron name for the new era of UK carrier strike.

So the naming of the squadrons in the Joint Lightning Force is a microcosm of a wider defence ambition - a joint approach, a spirit of collaboration and a shared equity. It is a powerful chemistry.

And I have this same sense of purpose and ambition in the international arena too. In the age of partnering I look forward to other navies participating in the maritime element of the UK’s Joint Expeditionary Force. We are in the foothills already.

There will be challenges and obstacles along the way, for sure. But the successes already enjoyed by the RFTG provide the guidance we need. And, if the ambition is matched by commitment, the joint value will prove itself.

So whether I use a national lens or an international lens, I see the same ambition through both.

Maritime forces optimise the delivery of contingency by providing truly useable Choice – Sea Choice. And leaning into the opportunities created by partnerships is a major and smart way of doing just that.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you.