

Speech: Maritime Strategy and its contribution to the Indo-Pacific and Global Commons

Introduction

Thank you, Rahul, for hosting us this evening, thank you for the introduction, it's a very great pleasure to be back here at IISS again and a very great pleasure to have my counterpart and friend Admiral Sunil Lanba here with us this evening.

Thank you [Admiral Lanba] for that very clear exposition of the Indian Navy's perspective and the strategy that underpins the really significant role your navy has delivering maritime security in this vitally important, and in many ways uniquely challenging, region.

I absolutely echo your words about how much I've enjoyed working with you. I regard you as one of the key naval counterparts, it's been my privilege to work alongside people who have shared almost exactly the same time in office as we have, and of course Sunil as you know on that list I include Admiral Jon Richardson from the United States, Admiral Christophe Prazuck from France and Admiral Yutaka Murakawa from the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force. It's been a great crop of Navy Chiefs in the '16 to '19 timeframe, I'm sure you'd agree.

And as you pointed out in your opening remarks, our tenures have mirrored each other, which has allowed the development of that personal bond, which is hugely valuable and important to shaping not only how we work together today but the relationship we shape for our navies going into the future.

And it's particularly pleasing from my perspective to host you here in the UK, to reciprocate the wonderful way you hosted me in Mumbai almost exactly 2 years ago at the decommissioning of INS Viraat, of course the former HMS Hermes.

As most of you know, because of his 2 jobs I have to share Admiral Lanba with my CDS, General Carter, so the formal CDS bit of the programme is tomorrow here in London, and I'm very much looking forward to hosting him as Naval Chiefs down in Portsmouth for the 2 days that follow that.

IISS have done a great job putting together events like this, giving 2 Naval Chiefs the opportunity to speak together and answer questions together on these really important topics for Navies. Having had the privilege of doing similar events here in the last 9 months, both with Admiral Jon Richardson from the United States, and with Vice Admiral Mike Noonan from the Australian Navy it's really clear to me that holding these kind of events enables us to develop that close partnership we have with each other, to set these key navy to navy relationships in perspective and to move the debate forward about

some of the significant challenges we face together.

Expanding maritime horizons

Those of you who are veterans of these events and have been to them before will have heard me use the phrase 'expanding maritime horizons', to describe what we've been trying to get the Royal Navy to do over the last couple of years, as the fleet has begun to reach out to parts of the world from which we had been absent for some time.

This strategy has allowed us to have some real tangible effect with international partners in every ocean of the world, enhancing maritime security and continuing to build that all important consensus on behaviours that, together with the feeling we both have of the regulations enshrined in international law, govern the use of the global commons that is the high seas to mutual supportive effect.

Increasingly our intentions are going to be built around forward deployed presence, as the Royal Navy looks to different operating models and different manning models within our transformation agenda, building from the Modernising Defence Programme of earlier this year. Our fleet's increased global presence I believe is set to stay; I know we have to find different ways of enabling the fleet to deliver on that, but I believe it is hugely welcomed by our partners in those regions where we are now beginning to reassert our presence, and establish it more regularly.

Indian Ocean

But I hope it will have escaped no one's attention that even when, for a host of very good reasons, we elected to temporarily rein in some of our global maritime activity and to confine the fleet's sphere of influence geographically, particularly to enable the presence in the Pacific Ocean for much of 2018, we did not denude our presence in the Indian Ocean. It remains for the Royal Navy an active area of interest, with a correspondingly regular drumbeat of both presence and activity.

And you only need look at the strategic significance of that region to understand why we made that call. Sat at the crossroads of international trade, it's an ocean that provides the vital link between the world's economic powerhouses of the Euro-Atlantic region and the Indo-Pacific region.

The flow of energy resources through its waters are particularly significant. Data from 2017 shows that about 39 million barrels per day pass through the Indian Ocean, equivalent to about 40 per cent of the world's total oil supply travels through the strategic choke points of that ocean, the Straits of Malacca and Hormuz and the Bab-el-Mandeb, that provide access into and out of the Indian Ocean.

Nor should we forget that the Indian Ocean that's more than a transit corridor; its densely populated littoral zones are areas of significant, rapid, economic growth in their own right, growth that is underpinned in part

by the rich natural resources that are found in the huge expanse of water that is the Indian Ocean.

Yet it is also a region that has seen more than its fair share of threats to security, notably in recent years through non-state actors engaged in piracy, smuggling and terrorism, all of whom have demanded a response. Meanwhile, the spectre of natural disasters, which have become all too frequent, remain ever present in that region too.

It is these challenges that combine to put the demand signal on the Royal Navy for continued presence in the region, whether that be on national tasking, working on a bilateral basis such as with the Indian Navy or under multilateral frameworks such as the Combined Maritime Forces coalition, or indeed the EU NAVFOR counter-piracy task group.

It's also why you've regularly seen Royal Navy officers providing crucial leadership of those task forces and task groups: permanent deputy command of Combined Maritime Forces in Bahrain, the most numerous individual command tours of the subordinate task groups of CMF, often combining that opportunity with other navies as we are about to do for example with the French in Task Force 150 and the Republic of Korea in Task Force 151; and at the same time continuous operational command of the EU NAVFOR Op Atalanta, countering piracy off Somalia for 10 straight years.

And whilst the escort we currently have on station in that part of the world, the Type 45 destroyer Dragon, and you heard Admiral Lanba mention that ship for its participation in Konkan 18, that ship might have enjoyed particularly conspicuous operational success recently, boasting 6 major drug seizures in the last 4 months, deployments like Dragon's, working to deter and disrupt illegal activity, are nothing new to the Royal Navy.

Nevertheless, our presence there now has a heightened sense of permanence to it through the opening in 2018 of our Naval Support Facility in Bahrain, a permanent footprint in the region re-established as a significant reversal of the withdrawal from East of Suez in the early 70s.

That facility is already home to the mine countermeasures force that we have had forward based in the Gulf, and have had so continuously for over 12 years, but with the imminent arrival and then long-term basing there of the Type 23 frigate Montrose, that is an example I hope of how we are exploiting forward basing with a dedicated ship capable of delivering a broad spectrum of effects at range from the UK.

And hopefully that's yet more proof, if any is needed, of our enduring commitment to maritime security in that region.

UKMTO

Now, of course, as you heard Admiral Lanba say, our contribution isn't just limited to the presence of ships, it's also the way in which we share information. And I'm pleased to say that when it comes to security of shipping transiting through the region, possibly one of the best known

agencies coordinating that security effort down the years has been the UK Maritime Trade Office co-located in our embassy in Dubai.

Established in 2001 to provide an operational interface between military and merchant shipping, this small Naval Party supports freedom of navigation by all mariners in the region through the delivery of timely maritime security information and, in the event of an incident, coordination of relief effort.

As trusted agents, the UKMTO has very often acted as the primary point of contact for merchant vessels of many nationalities involved in maritime incidents or when travelling through high risk areas; even with the once-commonplace threat of piracy around the Horn of Africa now significantly subdued, 80 to 85% of commercial shipping passing through that region still voluntarily report in to UKMTO and subscribe to the security information and advice that they provide in return.

But everyone involved in this security effort absolutely recognises that the most effective liaison comes from information sharing with as wide a body as possible, and the UKMTO is certainly not the only organisation making a valuable contribution in this way.

IFC-IOR

And that's why, catalysed by the signing of our bilateral 'white shipping' Memorandum of Understanding, which you heard Admiral Lanba refer to, our collaborative efforts have gone forward further as we watched to see how the Indian Navy develops it's Information Fusion Centre, Indian Ocean Region, the IFC-IOR, based in Gurugram, which opened last year.

We see that as already delivering real value in terms of its output, there is clear and obvious opportunity for significant growth in terms of what this centre can deliver. I absolutely echo Admiral Lanba's points on Royal Navy interaction with this centre, it's certainly something we're taking a very close interest as we go forward, potentially looking to establish a very credible leadership role alongside the Indian Navy in that fusion centre.

Capability development

But the relationship between the Royal Navy and Indian Navy, long-standing as it is and bilateral by design, goes of course far further than information sharing.

And it's only natural that this would be the case given the very obvious similarities between our 2 navies, our shared outlook, common goals, very clear intentions for the future, reflected in ambitious shipbuilding programmes and maritime innovation programmes, which we both have underway.

And given that shared outlook, I think there's a real opportunity for us to provide mutual support in capability development as we go forward, and I'm very pleased to say we are looking to seize that opportunity.

Admiral Lanba has already spoken of his forthcoming visit to our submarine

rescue facilities in Faslane Naval Base in Scotland later this week, and that's a great example of this cooperation, and I would also highlight our carrier capability partnership, through which I'm sure we will be able to develop further synergies in our respective future carrier strike capabilities, I'm very much looking forward to taking that partnership further forward this week when I host Admiral Lanba on board HMS Queen Elizabeth down in Portsmouth.

The important thing in all of this is that by developing these capabilities in tandem, we instinctively build in a level of interoperability that might not otherwise be there.

When you combine that with our regular operational interaction and exercises like the highly valuable bilateral Konkan series, of which you've already heard, all of that helps to align doctrine and tactics, and it means there can be no doubt we will be increasingly well placed to work together across the full spectrum of Naval activity, from disaster relief right through to high end warfighting, as together we pursue our shared aim to defend the global commons, and to embrace whatever security challenges the future might hold.

Conclusion

And so in closing I would observe this. Not only are our 2 countries' histories intertwined across the generations, today our nations have a huge amount in common too.

Britain and India are both in the list of top 10 of world economies, and those powerful economies are built upon a bedrock of global maritime trade. And I know we share a very clear understanding of both the opportunities and the challenges that are present in today's incredibly complex maritime domain.

It is that appreciation of the intensifying and diversifying threats we face, threats that manifest from space to the sea bed, that underlines the value of sea power both in India and here in the UK.

And through that comes the importance to both our nations of having a Navy that can not only defend the sea lines of communication around our immediate coastal waters, and the shipping that flows through it, but also one that can influence the wider global commons upon which our international trade flows, ensuring freedom of navigation for all who wish to use the sea for lawful purposes.

So ours is a challenge that transcends geographical boundaries; it's multi-dimensional and it's constantly evolving. But I know that, just as the Royal Navy is up for the challenge of that, so is the Indian Navy.

And by working together in this endeavour, through capability development, through the alignment of tactics and doctrine, through information sharing, and onwards into the delivery of operational effect, I firmly believe that both our navies, and through them both nations, will be all the stronger for

it.

Thank you very much.