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THESIS

**COMMITMENTS AND CAPABILITIES: THE ROYAL
NAVY IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

by

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CENTURY**

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ABSTRACT

The size of the British Royal Navy (RN) has decreased significantly over the last century. Recent policy documents have outlined plans for new warship construction as well as an increase in maritime strategic commitments, raising the question of whether the RN's means are sufficient to achieve the government's desired ends. This work compares the current and future capabilities of the Royal Navy against Britain's renewed global ambitions, to determine if the new policy is over-ambitious. It also identifies possible pitfalls that the RN may encounter as it reorients itself over the next decade. The three main findings can be summarized as follows: (1) the RN can meet its current and future commitments if the stated force structure plans are followed; (2) there is significant strategic risk associated with failure to follow-through on these plans, and finally (3) close cooperation with Britain's allies (both in NATO and globally) will continue to be an important supporting element of RN policy. This thesis recommends expanding new frigate construction following completion of the current contracts, ensuring renewed naval diplomacy produces meaningful benefits to offset its political and economic costs, and continuing the RN's strong track record of close integration with allies worldwide.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AEW	airborne early warning
ANZUK	Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom
ASW	anti-submarine warfare
AW	air warfare
CASD	Continuous at-Sea Deterrent
CMF	Combined Maritime Forces
CSG	carrier strike group
CV	aircraft carrier, conventionally powered
DDG	destroyer, guided missile
EU	European Union
FFG	frigate, guided missile
FPDA	Five Power Defence Arrangements
FSS	fleet solid support (ship)
HADR	humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
HMS	Her/His Majesty's Ship
JEF	Joint Expeditionary Force
LCU	landing craft, utility
LPD	amphibious transport dock
LSD	dock landing ship
MCM	mine countermeasures (also a class abbreviation for mine countermeasure ships)
MHC	minehunter, coastal
MIW	mine warfare
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OPV	offshore patrol vessel
RAF	Royal Air Force
RFA	Royal Fleet Auxiliary
RIMPAC	Rim of the Pacific
RN	Royal Navy

RUSI	<i>Royal United Services Institute</i>
SSBN	ballistic missile submarine (nuclear-powered)
SSK	attack submarine (diesel-powered)
SSN	attack submarine (nuclear-powered)
STOVL	short take-off, vertical landing
STUFT	ships taken up from trade
SW	surface warfare
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USN	United States Navy
USNI	U.S. Naval Institute
VLS	vertical launch system

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I. INTRODUCTION

By the use of the term ‘naval mastery’, however, there is meant here something stronger, more exclusive and wider-ranging; namely a situation in which a country has so developed its maritime strength that it is superior to any rival power, and that its predominance is or could be exerted far outside its home waters, with the result that it is extremely difficult for other, lesser states to undertake maritime operations or trade without at least its tacit consent.

—Paul Kennedy,
The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery, 1976¹

The name “British Royal Navy” carries a very complex connotation. For many, it immediately conjures images of Trafalgar and *Dreadnought*, symbols of unchallenged naval might from the age of the Pax Britannica. For more contemporary students, the name represents a highly professional but much diminished force, whose actual capability the layperson only vaguely comprehends. It certainly no longer exhibits “naval mastery” as defined by Kennedy above.² This dissonance between what the Royal Navy (RN) actually is, and what policymakers, planners, and the nation at large believe it could or should be, informs many of the changes the sea service has gone through over the past 80 years. For example, very few other nations with Britain’s military and economic capacity feel the need for fixed wing aircraft carriers. Very few peer nations see fit to deploy these forces beyond their home region in peacetime. The RN’s identity has long outstripped its means; however, the most recent strategic documents are attempting to reverse this trend.

Basil Liddell Hart coined the phrase “strategical over-extension” to mean “the possession by a state of numerous defence burdens and obligations, without the corresponding capacity to sustain them.”³ Strategic over-extension can happen due to

¹ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, Kindle Edition (London: Penguin Books, 2017), 9.

² Kennedy, 9.

³ Kennedy, 347–48.

shrinking capabilities (economic or military), increasing goals and obligations, or both. The history of the RN shows shrinking capabilities, with goals slow to adapt in response. Now, British strategic goals are becoming more ambitious; will their planned capabilities increase to match?⁴

The RN has shrunk significantly since World War II. But while its capacity has declined, global ambitions have not. The decision to withdraw from “east of Suez” in the 1960s was made due to insufficient capacity, not because the government believed that the Indo-Pacific was better off without a British military presence.⁵ While Britain’s ambitions did eventually contract, British national pride did not. The 2021 *Integrated Review* rekindles this global ambition, laying clear goals for British military presence worldwide.

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

Despite its loss of global preeminence, the British Royal Navy remains a significant military force and one of the few capable of blue-water power projection. The United Kingdom’s maritime strategic posture has changed along with the scope of its abilities. How successfully are the capabilities of the British Royal Navy matched with Britain’s current strategic policy? Do planned and future capabilities support these strategic goals, or has the United Kingdom overreached the abilities of its cherished sea service?

B. SIGNIFICANCE

This question has significance beyond its obvious relevance to British strategic and fiscal policymakers. As the United Kingdom proudly repeats throughout its *Integrated Review of Security, Defense, Development and Foreign Policy*, “the United States will

⁴ Her Majesty’s Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age: Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence by Command of Her Majesty* (London, UK, 2021), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/971859/CP_411_-_Defence_in_a_competitive_age.pdf.

⁵ Saki Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice between Europe and the World?*, 1st ed. 2002, Cold War History (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2002), 209–26, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230597785>.

remain the UK's most important strategic ally and partner.”⁶ A clear assessment of Britain's strategic goals is of definite interest to the United States and to Britain's NATO allies. The RN is one of the most capable NATO navies and has a significant role to play in deterring Russia. Understanding the strategic scope of the RN's capabilities can facilitate communication and operational planning while supporting alliance burden sharing through reduced uncertainty and elimination of duplicate capabilities.

Beyond Europe and the Baltic, both individual NATO members and the alliance as a whole have begun looking towards Asia. As the future role of the alliance in that region continues to develop, many European military ideas and policies may be forced to adapt to a broader geographic posture. The United Kingdom is actively pursuing such a shift, and by its pioneering efforts we may learn many useful lessons for other European powers, should they choose to “tilt to the Indo-Pacific” as well.⁷

Finally, the *Integrated Review*, published in 2021, has outlined significant changes to Britain's global strategic ambitions. The implications of these planned changes have not yet faced significant study by the larger academic and policy community. This study will add to the emerging literature on this recent policy document.

C. THESIS

Two main caveats must be established before attempting to judge strategic overreach. A case could be made that nearly every navy on Earth today is overstretched. No navy ever has as many ships as it would like on the eve of war, and by this metric it is easy to dismiss the Royal Navy's capabilities as inadequate. However, a fairer (and more useful) answer will be more nuanced than this. A gap between the Navy's capabilities and strategic goals adds risk, and some amount of this risk is likely to always be present. However, these risks can be mitigated through alliances and diplomacy. Additionally,

⁶ Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* (London, UK, 2021), 60, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/969402/The_Integrated_Review_of_Security__Defence__Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf.

⁷ Her Majesty's Government, 60.

navies enjoy a diverse range of employment outside the context of open warfare with a peer competitor. From diplomatic port calls and humanitarian aid to power projection and regional military intervention, a navy's ability to meet the nation's needs cannot be measured by raw tonnage alone.

We are also living in an unprecedented era of multilateralism. Examples such as the Balkan wars in the 1990s, Iraq in 1991 and 2003, Libya in 2011, and the aborted Syrian intervention in 2013 show that Western governments prefer at minimum a veneer of international consensus before employing force abroad. The Syrian case is especially interesting, demonstrating that the United States was hesitant to employ force alone even when it was well within its military capacity to do so.⁸ Beyond active uses of force, NATO operations support collective defense and deterrence, benefiting from the fact that the alliance is stronger as a result of its multilateral character. With this fact in mind, navies should not only be measured in isolation from their allies and partners. In terms of strategic capacity for the actual use of force, the Royal Navy's capacity for multilateral integration will likely count for as much as its hull displacement.

With these caveats established, this thesis will argue that the British Royal Navy, *as conceived* by the *Integrated Review* and related government documents, is capable of meeting its global commitments and serving British strategic interests, including its interest in remaining America's preeminent ally at sea. The 2021 *Integrated Review* has laid the groundwork for a more capable navy, suited to low-intensity global power projection and fully capable of integrating with allies to contribute meaningfully to high-end naval warfare.⁹

The emphasis in the previous paragraph is on "as conceived," because although the navy that is planned in the *Integrated Review* may be capable of meeting Britain's strategic needs, there is no guarantee that it will in fact come into being or be employed as currently envisioned. This research will compare the Royal Navy in fact with its intended future

⁸ James Strong, "Interpreting the Syria Vote: Parliament and British Foreign Policy," *International Affairs* 91, no. 5 (September 2015): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12401>.

⁹ Her Majesty's Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 44–62.

capabilities. The comparison is likely to shed an unfavorable light on Britain's actual, present-day strategic capacity, as is normal whenever one compares the real with the ideal. There are also challenges to defense procurement—some universal, others unique to the United Kingdom—which mean that projected future capability may fall short of aspirations. Finally, attention must be paid to the Royal Navy's capability gaps which will emerge as some naval platforms are potentially retired before others come online. As a result, the next ten years could see an increase in the aforementioned strategic risk as the RN works to meet its commitments.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

For an organization whose identity, cultural significance, and role is as steeped in history as the British Royal Navy, it is impossible to discuss modern policy without a historical foundation. In his seminal 1976 work *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, Paul Kennedy begins the “fall” in 1897. Since then, and with the significant interruption of two world wars, the British Royal Navy has faced a near continuous period of decline relative to the naval capacities of both rivals and partners.¹⁰ Dockrill points out that even after the empire was gone, there was a perceived need to maintain a global presence, unusual among European states in its scope.¹¹ Since Kennedy finished his book in the 1970s, there have been efforts to bolster the size and capability of the RN. Most recently, the British Government published an *Integrated Review of Security, Defense, Development and Foreign Policy* that outlined significant increases in both defense capabilities and commitments.¹²

There are a few major sources that have set the groundwork for the literature on this subject. Kennedy's book is one of them, as was mentioned above.¹³ In addition, no discussion of Western naval strategy would be complete without reference to the works of

¹⁰ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, chaps. 8–12.

¹¹ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*, 36.

¹² Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*.

¹³ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*.

Geoffrey Till. Her Majesty's Government's *Integrated Review* and the Ministry of Defence's *Defence in a Competitive Age* detail the UK's current naval policy.¹⁴ These documents are especially valuable in comparison to the *Strategic Defence Reviews* from 2010 and 2015, demonstrating instances of continuity (or lack thereof).¹⁵ For open-source information, *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships: 1947–1995* and *Jane's World Navies* provide detailed data on past and present RN fleet composition and capabilities.¹⁶

Beyond the strategic publications, primary source information is available in significant volume through the United Kingdom's official government websites, to include budgetary information and official parliamentary debate transcription by Hansard.¹⁷

Two particular organizations have provided a wealth of literature and merit special note. The *Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)* and the *Corbett Center for Maritime Policy Studies* have published a wide variety of both academic and editorial pieces which provide insight into this discussion. Although *RUSI* works are frequently editorial in character, they do serve to highlight contemporary debates and perspectives on British military affairs.

Most sources divide Britain's strategic commitments into three or four concise objectives. Of course, those objectives change over time and—often—are based on the perspective of the author. For Kennedy, the RN's objectives were defending Britain's territories, defending western Europe, ensuring maritime communications, and

¹⁴ Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*; Her Majesty's Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*.

¹⁵ Her Majesty's Government and Ministry of Defence, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*. (London, UK: Stationery Office, 2010); Her Majesty's Government and Ministry of Defence, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom.*, 2015.

¹⁶ Robert Gardiner and Stephen Chumbley, eds., *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships, 1947–1995* (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 479–543; Janes, “United Kingdom - Navy” (Janes World Navies, November 9, 2021).

¹⁷ HM Treasury, “Spending Review 2020,” gov.uk, April 16, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2020-documents/spending-review-2020>; UK Parliament, “Publications & Records,” accessed April 29, 2021, <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/>.

maintaining nuclear deterrence.¹⁸ Black et al. focus heavily on the United Kingdom's alliance commitments, in addition to protecting people, protecting global influence, and promoting prosperity.¹⁹ The government's own report specifies sovereignty, security, and prosperity.²⁰ What stands out is that trade and economic influence features consistently. This intermingling of defense policy and economic policy reflects the historic maritime and financial foundations of British power.

The aircraft carrier is another common theme in Royal Navy literature. The RN was the first to heavily invest and commit to the use of carriers, but their purchase and maintenance has been a point of some controversy. Since World War II, the British carrier fleet diminished significantly and has remained on rocky political footing ever since.²¹ This reduction was driven by budgetary pressure and, to some extent, claims of the superiority and viability of land-based air forces.²² However, authors such as Wood, Willett, Kaushal, and Benbow have offered arguments throughout the years in favor of their retention and use.²³ This debate is especially significant in light of the recently commissioned *Queen Elizabeth* class, which has replaced and significantly modernized the

¹⁸ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, 330–34.

¹⁹ James Black et al., “Defence and Security after Brexit: Understanding the Possible Implications of the UK's Decision to Leave the EU -- Compendium Report” (Santa Monica, CA and Cambridge, UK: RAND Corporation, 2017), 26.

²⁰ Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 13.

²¹ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*, 39–40, 138–44; Robert Gardiner and Stephen Chumbley, eds., “United Kingdom,” in *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships, 1947–1995* (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 479–543.

²² Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*, 140–91.

²³ Tim Benbow, “British Uses of Aircraft Carriers and Amphibious Ships: 1945 – 2010,” *The Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies*, Corbett Paper, No 9 (March 2012); Sidharth Kaushal, “Persistent Engagement and Strategic Raiding: Leveraging the UK's Future Carrier Strike Capability to Effect,” *Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies*, Occasional Papers, November 26, 2020, <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/persistent-engagement-and-strategic-raiding-leveraging-uk-future>; Lee Willett, “CVF: For the Nation, Not the Navy,” *Royal United Services Institute*, July 3, 2009, <https://rusi.org/commentary/cvf-nation-not-navy>; Michael Wood, “US Carrier Strike and the Mediterranean, 1970–89: Lessons in Littoral Crisis Response for the United Kingdom's Joint Expeditionary Force,” *The Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies*, no. 14 (August 2014): 53.

Royal Navy carrier fleet. The planned use of these new carriers is much vaunted in the 2021 *Integrated Review*.²⁴

The ambitious plans laid out in the 2021 *Integrated Review* have been met with a healthy amount of skepticism. The criticisms can be broadly categorized into doubts regarding financial availability, organizational capacity, and administrative decision-making processes. On the financial side, Parker argues that annual budgetary reviews do not provide adequate, assured funding for long-term projects such as the development and construction of ships.²⁵ Chalmers offers a relatively neutral perspective but does point out that potential modernization of Britain's nuclear deterrent may disrupt current budgeting.²⁶ In terms of organizational capacity, Jessett, McKane, and Watkins are skeptical based on past defense reviews that the British military organization can successfully adapt within time and budget constraints.²⁷ Administratively, both Parker and Watling criticize the lack of interservice coordination or internal decision-making mechanisms that go into documents like the *Integrated Review*, making the document's policy prescriptions less likely to be realized.²⁸ This last point is in contrast to writers such as Thomson and Blagden, whose 2018 article highlights many of the benefits of specific reforms to British strategic policymaking in the last few decades.²⁹

²⁴ Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 5.

²⁵ John Parker, "An Independent Report to Inform the UK National Shipbuilding Strategy," November 29, 2016, 2, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/572532/UK_National_Shipbuilding_Strategy_report-FINAL-20161103.pdf.

²⁶ Malcolm Chalmers, "The Integrated Review: The UK as a Reluctant Middle Power?," *Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies*, Occasional Papers, March 2021, 13–16, <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/integrated-review-uk-reluctant-middle-power>.

²⁷ Will Jessett, Tom McKane, and Peter Watkins, "Five Tests for the Integrated Review," *Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies*, Occasional Papers, December 8, 2020, viii–ix, <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/five-tests-integrated-review>.

²⁸ Parker, "An Independent Report to Inform the UK National Shipbuilding Strategy," 2–4; Jack Watling, "A Post Mortem of a Disintegrated Review," *Royal United Services Institute*, April 9, 2021, <https://rusi.org/commentary/post-mortem-disintegrated-review>.

²⁹ Catarina P Thomson and David Blagden, "A Very British National Security State: Formal and Informal Institutions in the Design of UK Security Policy," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 20, no. 3 (August 2018): 573–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148118784722>.

The role of Britain's alliances is another topic of significant study. The *Integrated Review* continues a trend of Britain committing heavily to its special relationship and alliance with the United States.³⁰ Dockrill, Kennedy, and Paget detail how this alliance relationship has been crucial to British foreign policy since its foundation.³¹ More modern works support this trend, such as Gaston's recommendation to more closely coordinate with the Americans on policy towards China (whether this would come at the cost of inter-European cooperation is an interesting question and remains to be seen).³² Beyond the United States and NATO, the UK also has longstanding defense ties to many countries globally. These alliances, especially in the Indo-Pacific, provide a convenient avenue for increased RN presence and involvement in global affairs.

On the topic of methodology, there have been numerous attempts to quantify and rank navies. These include factors such as size, capabilities, reach, modernity, and mission. Authors with contributions to this area include Morris, Grove, Lindberg, Coutau-Bégarie, Till, Barber et Sipos, and Haydon.³³ While this study does not intend to expand on a quantitative line of research, these methods bear mentioning as they provide a useful framework for discussing intended employment of navies and evaluating relative capabilities.

Of significant present-day importance is the debate about Great Britain's future in the Indo-Pacific. Referred to as "east of Suez" (to include the Middle East and Arabian

³⁰ Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 20, 60; Her Majesty's Government and Ministry of Defence, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015*, 14, 51–52.

³¹ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*, chap. 1; Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, chaps. 11–12; Steven Paget, *The Dynamics of Coalition Naval Warfare: The Special Relationship at Sea*, Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies Series (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315552545>.

³² Sophia Gaston, "The Integrated Review of UK Foreign Policy: 10 Key Insights," British Foreign Policy Group, March 16, 2021, <https://bfpgrp.co.uk/2021/03/integrated-review-10-things/>.

³³ Each author's work stands alone in its own right, but an overview of their theories was encountered in Michael Mulqueen, Deborah Sanders, and Ian Speller, *Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), 15–50, as well as Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, Fourth edition., Cass Series: Naval Policy and History 61 (London; Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018).

Gulf as well) in the defense debates of the 1960s, this region has become a focus of renewed economic and military competition in recent years. In contrast to its earlier Cold War era drawdown and withdrawal, Britain has committed to an increased presence in the region.³⁴ The Royal Navy will serve as the primary arm of this new policy, with the first carrier strike group deployment conducted in 2021.³⁵ Some authors have remained skeptical of this “tilt,” with Chalmers, for example, arguing that increasing Sino-American tension will cause the United Kingdom to double-down on its presence in the Atlantic.³⁶

For further analysis on this topic, readers should review the House of Commons report HC 168, titled *We’re going to need a bigger Navy*.³⁷ Published in mid-December 2021, this document appeared too late for its content to be significantly incorporated into this project. This is unfortunate, as the report contains a wealth of primary source testimony and analysis by key decisionmakers within Parliament and the Ministry of Defence on the viability and strategic risk posed by the naval plan put forward in the *Integrated Review*. Had it been published sooner, the Parliamentary report would certainly have featured heavily in this project. However, where the Parliamentary report offered suggestions for how the future structure of the RN should be amended, this project simply seeks to analyze the strengths and shortcomings of the plan as it was conceived in March of 2021.

E. ORGANIZATION

This project will compare the current and future planned Royal Navy against its strategic commitments to determine how credibly it can meet each challenge, either separately or simultaneously. Chapter II will outline Britain’s existing strategic commitments, in terms of Europe/NATO, allies beyond Europe, and finally the Commonwealth and Overseas Territories. Chapter III details the current capabilities and

³⁴ Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez*; Her Majesty’s Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 66–67.

³⁵ Her Majesty’s Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 73.

³⁶ Chalmers, “The Integrated Review,” vii.

³⁷ House of Commons Defence Committee, *We’re Going to Need a Bigger Navy*, December 7, 2021, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmselect/cmdfence/168/report.html>.

limitations of the Royal Navy, before discussing how well the current RN is structured to handle British strategic commitments. Chapter IV repeats this methodology, but with an eye towards the notional fleet of 2030, based on planned new capabilities and construction. Finally, Chapter V will present findings, recommendations, and concluding remarks.

F. EVOLUTION OF THE BRITISH FLEET AND BRITISH MARITIME STRATEGY

In order to discuss the present and future of the Royal Navy, it is important to establish where it has come from. The following section will briefly overview changes to the capabilities, operations, and procurement challenges of the RN since the end of World War II. It will also lay the groundwork for several key debates which persist in British naval planning to this day.

1. Capabilities

Every major navy shrank in the years immediately after WWII. There was simply no need to maintain the massive wartime fleets. From being the second-largest fleet in the world (first largest, until they were eclipsed by the U.S. Navy in 1943), the RN would shrink dramatically after the war. It continued this trend, with the number of ships currently in commission at less than 10% of its 1950s values (see Figure 1).³⁸ In 1973, famous naval reference catalogue Janes wrote, “The stark truth is that the Royal Navy has fallen below the safety level required to protect the home islands, to guard the ocean trade routes for the world-deployed mercantile marine ..., to protect the vast commercial and financial interests overseas, and to meet the NATO, ANZUK and other treaty commitments.”³⁹ Kennedy credits this fall in large part to the relative and absolute economic decline the UK suffered, beginning as early as 1898, but most noticeably in the immediate postwar years.⁴⁰

³⁸ Gardiner and Chumbley, “United Kingdom,” 479–543; Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, xvi.

³⁹ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, 335.

⁴⁰ Kennedy, chaps. 8, 11.

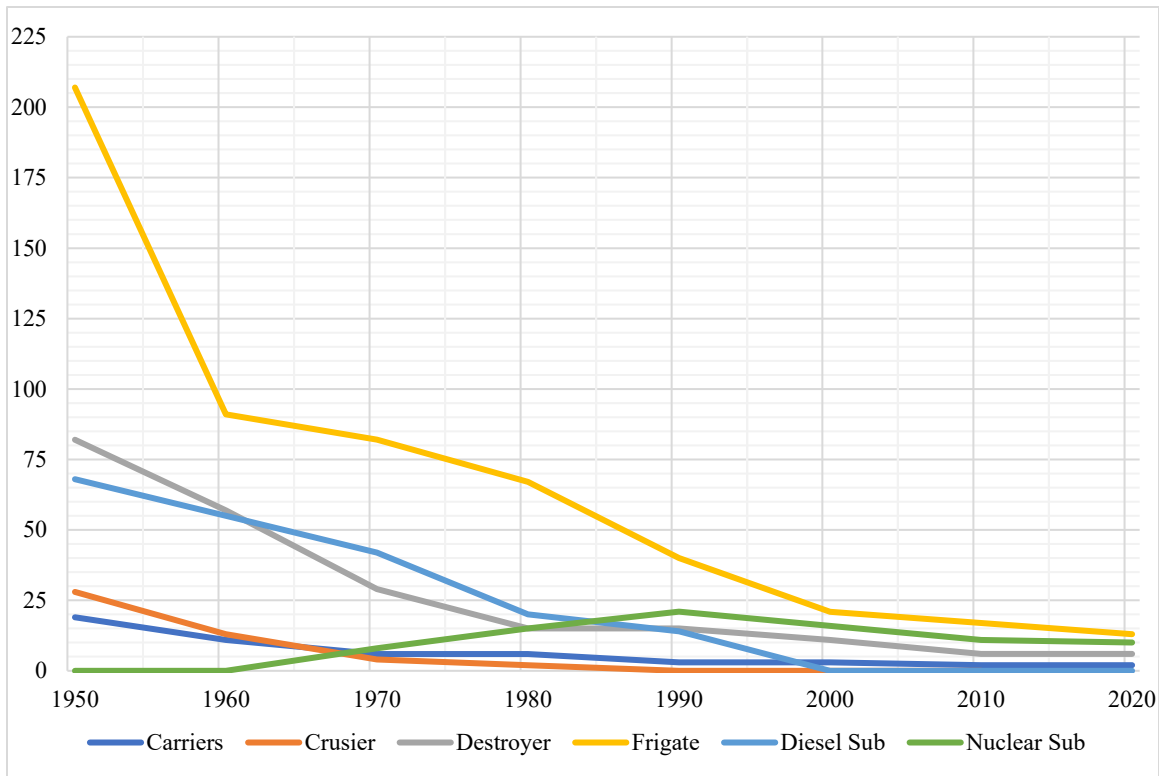


Figure 1. Royal Navy Order of Battle, 1950–2020⁴¹

One of the most distinct and noticeable signs of this contraction was the formal withdrawal from “east of Suez,” a term which most notably includes the entire Indo-Pacific as well as significant British colonial influence in the Middle East. This withdrawal was much debated and postponed by British policymakers.⁴² However, the changing economic and political landscape in the postwar decades made retaining this presence untenable.⁴³

⁴¹ Gardiner and Chumbley, “United Kingdom,” 479–543; Ministry of Defence, “Formations, Vessels & Aircraft,” Statistical Series (London, UK: Ministry of Defence, November 21, 2013), 8; “Pennant List – United Kingdom,” Janes Fighting Ships, July 6, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/JFS_4493-JFS_.

⁴² Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez*, 1–7.

⁴³ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, xxii; Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez*, chap. 8; William D. James, “Global Britain’s Strategic Problem East of Suez,” *European Journal of International Security* 6, no. 2 (May 2021): 171–73, <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2020.24>.

Britain had become more dependent on its allies to support its strategic policy in the Pacific, and Australia had long since turned to the United States as its primary defensive partner.⁴⁴

The aircraft carrier generated a significant amount of drama in the east of Suez conversation. They have in fact been generating drama since the RN pioneered the concept, but the east of Suez carrier debates of the 1960s are of particular note. The aircraft carrier was—as it is today—a symbol of global power projection. Their retention was closely associated with British Pacific policy.⁴⁵ It was estimated that the RN would need to retain four of its carriers at a minimum in order to maintain its presence east of Suez. The Navy of course was in favor of retaining them, but the Foreign Office led the opposition on budgetary grounds.⁴⁶ Following decades of recurring debate, the carrier force diminished and then disappeared in 2011.⁴⁷ The navy that had pioneered naval aviation in the interwar years had later forgone it completely.⁴⁸

Nuclear weapons are another key capability, the debates around which have shaped the modern RN as well as British strategy at large. Dockrill recounts the nuclear debates of the 1950s and 60s. The choice between a domestically developed nuclear capability (*Blue Streak*, *Blue Water*, and *Skybolt* programs) or the purchase of equivalent American systems was ultimately decided by financial limitations.⁴⁹ The eventual decision to adopt the Polaris submarines as the exclusive strategic nuclear platform solidified the RN's role as the nuclear arm of the British military.⁵⁰ However, it also represents a significant, recurring

⁴⁴ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*, 222–23; Allan Gyngell, “Fear of Abandonment: Australia's Response to Changing Global Orders,” <https://rusi.org/event/gallipoli-memorial-lecture-fear-of-abandonment-australia%E2%80%99s-response-changing-global-orders>.

⁴⁵ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*, 138–39.

⁴⁶ Dockrill, 138–39.

⁴⁷ In 2010–2011 HMS *Illustrious* was converted into a Helicopter Landing Platform. Dockrill, chap. 9; Ministry of Defence, “Formations, Vessels & Aircraft,” 8.

⁴⁸ Basil Germond, “Small Navies in Perspective: Deconstructing the Hierarchy of Naval Forces,” in *Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace*, ed. Michael Mulqueen, Deborah Sanders, and Ian Speller (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), 205.

⁴⁹ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*, 77–78.

⁵⁰ Dockrill, 61–62, 77–78.

sunk cost which has cast a shadow over RN budgets to this day.⁵¹ This is especially relevant as the projected necessary upgrades to technology and arsenal size over the coming decade could significantly overstretch the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) budget.⁵² Given that the nuclear deterrent is based in Scotland, renewed discussions of Scottish independence further complicate the issue.⁵³

2. Procurement

As with most modern militaries, the UK has been hampered by bureaucratic military procurement challenges. In the F-111 versus aircraft carrier debates (the former seen as a potential capability replacement for the latter), the Navy lost out. In other cases, such as the Nimrod (AEW variant) system adoption, the capability was late and over budget, eventually being scrapped completely.⁵⁴ These issues continue to the present day, with debates and delays surrounding the acquisition of the much-vaunted F-35 strike fighter and a new class of dry cargo logistics vessels. There is no shortage of opinion pieces claiming that the Navy overcommitted on the carriers and now lacks the fleet escorts and support ships to operate them effectively.⁵⁵

3. Operations

Despite diminishing in size, the Royal Navy has maintained an interventionist policy roughly commensurate with its capabilities. After “passing the trident” to the United

⁵¹ Chalmers, “The Integrated Review,” 15.

⁵² Chalmers, 15–16.

⁵³ Joshua A Overn, “Scotland’s Potential Independence Defense Implications for Britain, NATO, and the United States” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/58348>.

⁵⁴ Theodore H. Moran, “The Globalization of America’s Defense Industries: Managing the Threat of Foreign Dependence,” *International Security* 15, no. 1 (1990): 67–68, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538982>.

⁵⁵ Andrew Chuter, “Here’s Why Britain Is Struggling to Form a Fully Effective Carrier Strike Group,” *Defense News*, June 26, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2020/06/26/heres-why-britain-is-struggling-to-form-a-fully-effective-carrier-strike-group/>; David Axe, “Britain Spent So Much On Two Giant Aircraft Carriers, It Can’t Afford Planes Or Escorts,” *Forbes*, June 28, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2020/06/28/britain-spent-so-much-on-two-giant-aircraft-carriers-it-cant-afford-planes-or-escorts/>.

States (Robb-Webb cites 1944, Kennedy 1919), the UK has remained an active naval player whenever possible.⁵⁶ Often but not always in concert with the United States, the RN has conducted operations from Argentina to Zimbabwe, as well as extensive patrols in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf (see Figure 2).⁵⁷ This tendency places it in contrast with many other European navies, which scaled back the scope of their operations much more drastically after World War II.



Highlighted countries include combat and humanitarian operations as well as deliberate shows of force, but they exclude non-coercive peacetime exercises and training missions. Not visible at this scale are Belize, Mauritius, and the British Virgin Islands.

Figure 2. Countries Subject to Royal Navy Operations 1946–2010⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, 263; Jon Robb-Webb, “The British Pacific Fleet and the Decline of Empire? Adaptations to Change,” in *Sea Power and the Asia-Pacific*, ed. Geoffrey Till and Patrick C Bratton (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 214.

⁵⁷ Benbow, “British Uses of Aircraft Carriers and Amphibious Ships: 1945 – 2010,” 13–60.

⁵⁸ Adapted from Benbow, 13–60. Graphic generated using Visme.co

G. BREXIT AND SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE

A brief note: discussions surrounding Britain's decision to leave the European Union and the potential breakup of the United Kingdom are common throughout contemporary security literature. Although these issues warrant acknowledgement and will be mentioned occasionally, detailed analysis of their implications is beyond the scope of this work. Overn has prepared a thorough review of the defense (and especially nuclear) implications of the Scottish question.⁵⁹ There is perhaps room for additional scholarship on the defense implications of Irish unification, but again, such discussion is beyond the confines of this project.

H. CONCLUSION

The Royal Navy is much diminished since its glory days but remains a capable force with deep institutional knowledge. It has maintained a global interventionist mindset, which lends credibility to its renewed commitment to global presence. Although it is unlikely to reach the same relative strength it held at the turn of the twentieth century, there are signs of growth on the horizon. The newest *Integrated Review* lays out a plan for a scaled-up, more capable naval force.⁶⁰ The open question, however, is whether these changes will be enough to meet Britain's expanding strategic commitments. Can Britain execute the plan as currently conceived? Chapter II will detail Britain's strategic commitments, both in Europe and elsewhere, in order to establish the scope of the task that the British government has set for itself.

⁵⁹ Overn, "Scotland's Potential Independence Defense Implications for Britain, NATO, and the United States."

⁶⁰ Her Majesty's Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 46–49.

II. BRITAIN'S STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

Therefore I say that it is a narrow policy to suppose that this country or that is to be marked out as the eternal ally or the perpetual enemy of England. We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.

—Lord Palmerston,
Addressing the House of Commons, 1 March 1848⁶¹

Britain's strategic position has changed significantly since Lord Palmerston spoke in 1848, and although nothing is permanent, many of the UK's alliances have been remarkably enduring. This chapter will catalogue the extent of the Royal Navy's commitments and obligations. There are numerous different ways to categorize the RN's force commitments. This chapter will modify Churchill's concept of three geopolitical "circles" to the present strategic environment.⁶² They are thus broadly divided into NATO, allied commitments beyond Europe, and commitments to the Commonwealth and Overseas Territories. There is naturally some overlap (for example, India and Australia are members of the Commonwealth but have a more complex defense relationship with Britain than the Pitcairn Islands), but these issues will be addressed as they arise.

A. EUROPE AND NATO

The broader European theater (to include the North Atlantic and Mediterranean) is the traditional home front for the Royal Navy. During the buildup to World War I, commentators compared naval forces being recalled from distant stations to "the position of Imperial Rome when the Barbarians were thundering at the frontiers. The ominous word has gone forth. We have called home the legions."⁶³ Europe is where the existential threats

⁶¹ Palmerston, "Hansard, 01 March 1848, Volume 97," col. 122, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1848-03-01/debates/2221a5d7-21f5-49c5-a64a-cc333b61d517/TreatyOfAdrianople%E2%80%94ChargesAgainstViscountPalmerston?>

⁶² John Van Oudenaren, "The United Kingdom: Old Dilemmas and New Realities," in *European Foreign Policies: Does Europe Still Matter?* 2010, 1.

⁶³ The Standard, 29 May 1912, via Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, 205.

to Britain have traditionally lived, and modern history shows that conflict anywhere from Brest to the Bosphorus is of pressing concern to British strategic leadership. This geographical taxonomy is further reinforced by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which endures as the primary forum for military cooperation and originally had a strictly delimited geographical basis.

1. Standing Missions

The following section details the Royal Navy's continuous missions and commitments within Europe and in support of NATO.

a. Defend/Deter Russia

The Royal Navy maintains several standing missions within Europe and the traditional geographic scope of NATO. Although rarely explicitly aimed at Russia, these missions generally aim to prevent nuclear or conventional attack against the UK home islands or its allies. In the present geopolitical climate, however, the implicit threat is Russia.

b. Home Island Defense Patrols/Fleet Ready Escort

The defense of the homeland is the primary duty of all navies, but not necessarily the most immediate concern. The only significant element of "homeland defense" in the Government's current plan is for airborne defense patrols.⁶⁴ When required, these aircraft can be supplemented by the "Fleet Ready Escort;" a frigate or destroyer on standby to respond to emergent threats.⁶⁵ It is assumed that ships undergoing training and maintenance in home waters could be pressed into service for this purpose in an emergency.

⁶⁴ Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 71.

⁶⁵ *The Royal Navy: Deployed Forward - Operating Globally* (Royal Navy), 2, accessed August 19, 2021, https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/About-the-Royal-Navy/~/_media/Files/Navy-PDFs/About-the-Royal-Navy/Current%20RN%20Operations.pdf.

c. *NATO Standing Naval Forces*

Standing NATO Maritime Groups are a component of the standing NATO response forces. Their composition rotates between member nations, and thus the RN is rarely required to commit more than a single escort to the force.⁶⁶ At time of writing, Standing NATO Maritime Group One is composed of a Dutch frigate, Danish frigate, and German replenishment ship.⁶⁷ Maritime Group Two contains an Italian, Spanish, and Turkish frigate.⁶⁸ NATO also maintains standing Mine Countermeasure (MCM) forces (Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Groups One and Two) which are also formed from a rotating list of NATO MCM vessels, one of them presently British.⁶⁹ In January 2022, the RN's Rear Admiral Mike Utley took overall command of the NATO Maritime High Readiness Force.⁷⁰

d. *Fishery Protection*

The RN's Overseas Patrol Squadron is composed of four *River* class Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs) and a single helicopter, tasked with patrolling Britain's exclusive economic zone and enforcing fisheries regulations.⁷¹ The squadron made news in 2021 as Brexit complicated the fishing rights between Britain and its European neighbors.⁷²

⁶⁶ NATO, "Maritime Groups," Allied Maritime Command, accessed February 17, 2022, <https://mc.nato.int/missions/NATO-standing-naval-forces.aspx>.

⁶⁷ NATO, "Standing NATO Maritime Group One (SNMG1)," Allied Maritime Command, accessed February 17, 2022, <https://mc.nato.int/SNMG1.aspx>.

⁶⁸ NATO, "Standing NATO Maritime Group Two (SNMG2)," Allied Maritime Command, accessed February 17, 2022, <https://mc.nato.int/SNMG2.aspx>.

⁶⁹ HMS *Grimsby*, a *Sandown*-class minesweeper. NATO, "Maritime Groups."

⁷⁰ "'Pride, Passion and Purpose' as Royal Navy Takes on Key NATO Mission," Royal Navy, January 11, 2022, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2022/january/11/20220111-prince-of-wales-nato>.

⁷¹ "Overseas Patrol Squadron," Royal Navy, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/united-kingdom/overseas-patrol-squadron>.

⁷² Daniel Boffey, "What Is behind the Dispute over Fishing Rights around Jersey?" *The Guardian*, May 6, 2021, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/may/06/what-jersey-fishing-rights-dispute-boris-johnson-patrol-boats>.

e. Continuous At Sea Deterrent

Continuous At Sea Deterrence (CASD) consists of ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) patrols to ensure that the United Kingdom retains a credible nuclear deterrent. The mission is currently held by the RN's four *Vanguard* class submarines. The HMS *Dreadnought* class currently being developed is expected to replace the aging SSBN fleet.⁷³

In support of the CASD mission, the RN also maintains a Type 23 frigate as a "Towed Array Patrol Ship." This is another example of a high-readiness standby vessel; in this case, one prepared to conduct anti-submarine operations in defense of the SSBN fleet. Mine countermeasure forces are similarly kept available to support the CASD mission.⁷⁴

As mentioned previously, the nuclear deterrent role of the Royal Navy represents a significant amount of the budget, both for the Navy and the MoD as a whole. The 2021 *Integrated Review* calls for the modernization of the nuclear arsenal as well as its expansion, from "no more than" 225 warheads, up to a maximum of 260.⁷⁵ This represents a significant, long-term outlay of funds and will create budget inflexibility. The replacement of the *Vanguard* class further strains the budget.⁷⁶ This plan to upgrade the nuclear forces is significant enough to be considered a strategic commitment in its own right.

⁷³ "Continuous At Sea Deterrent," Government, Royal Navy, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/global/continuous-at-sea-deterrent>.

⁷⁴ Francois, "Hansard (Commons), 27 January 2014," cols. 414W-415W, accessed August 13, 2021, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140127/text/140127w0002.htm#140127w0002.htm_wqn32; George Allison, "What Is the Purpose of the Towed Array Patrol Ship?," *UK Defence Journal*, March 25, 2019, <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/what-is-the-purpose-of-the-towed-array-patrol-ship/>.

⁷⁵ Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 76.

⁷⁶ Chalmers, "The Integrated Review," 15–16; Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 76.

f. Joint Expeditionary Force and UK-Netherlands Amphibious Force

The Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) is a “NATO compatible” contingency force.⁷⁷ It is British-led, with members that include Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.⁷⁸ Saxi stresses that the JEF is not a standing force, but rather a “force pool” of units ready and notionally available for combined tasking.⁷⁹ Exercise Baltic Protector was the first major training deployment for this combined force.⁸⁰ The separate, bilateral UK-Netherlands joint amphibious force operates along similar lines.⁸¹

g. Carrier Strike Group

The 2021 *Integrated Review* included much fanfare about the first deployment of the HMS *Queen Elizabeth* Carrier Strike Group.⁸² Although the RN has yet to establish a pattern of deployments for its new capital ships, it seems probable that it will attempt to employ them to the maximum extent possible as a signal of the RN’s strength and significance to both foreign and domestic audiences. A carrier strike group (CSG) is eventually planned to become “permanently available to NATO.”⁸³ To that end, recurring Strike Group deployments (with two to four escorts and an auxiliary ship) are expected to become the norm.

⁷⁷ Håkon Lunde Saxi, “The UK Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF),” *Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies*, no. 5 (2018): 1.

⁷⁸ “Joint Expeditionary Force (Maritime),” Royal Navy, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/mediterranean-and-black-sea/joint-expeditionary-force-maritime>.

⁷⁹ Saxi, “The UK Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF),” 3.

⁸⁰ “Baltic Protector,” Royal Navy, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/arctic-and-northern-european-waters/baltic-protector>.

⁸¹ Black et al., “Defence and Security after Brexit: Understanding the Possible Implications of the UK’s Decision to Leave the EU -- Compendium Report,” 30.

⁸² Her Majesty’s Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 23.

⁸³ Her Majesty’s Government and Ministry of Defence, 13.

h. Patrol Boat Squadrons

Finally, the RN maintains patrol boat squadrons in both Gibraltar and Faslane. The Gibraltar squadron exists to protect British interests in the Gibraltar territory as well as provide an escort for friendly vessels transiting the Straits.⁸⁴ The Faslane squadron supports the CASD mission by providing escort and security for submarines in the vicinity of the base.⁸⁵

2. Standing Exercises

The Royal Navy participates in two main, recurring exercises within Europe. Exercise Baltops is an annual NATO exercise designed to promote interoperability and display capability.⁸⁶ Exercise Joint Warrior is a British-led exercise that also includes non-NATO partners. The RN cites that the last Joint Warrior included 16 warships and 58 aircraft, drawn from various nations.⁸⁷

3. Treaty Obligations

The following treaty obligations encompass the majority of the RN's formal commitments in and around Europe.

a. NATO

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is the primary alliance commitment for Britain, both in the European region and in general. The alliance represents one of the most enduring alliances of modern times and includes robust provisions for cooperation and

⁸⁴ "Gibraltar Squadron," Royal Navy, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/mediterranean-and-black-sea/gibraltar-squadron>.

⁸⁵ "Faslane Patrol Boat Squadron," Royal Navy, accessed August 27, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/united-kingdom/faslane-patrol-boat-squadron>.

⁸⁶ NATO, "The 50th BALTOPS Kicks Off in June," Allied Maritime Command, May 24, 2021, <https://sfn.nato.int/newsroom/2021/the-50th-baltops-kicks-off-in-june.aspx>.

⁸⁷ "Exercise Joint Warrior," Royal Navy, accessed August 27, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/united-kingdom/exercise-joint-warrior>.

mutual defense.⁸⁸ Since its inception, the Alliance has expanded to military cooperation beyond Europe as well.⁸⁹ The majority of British defense activity can be connected in some way to the NATO mission.

b. Lancaster House Treaties

The 2010 Lancaster House Treaties with France also represent a significant bilateral defense agreement. They include provisions for nuclear defense coordination and joint armaments procurement.⁹⁰ In the Treaties, each party promises not to “hinder legitimate access to its markets and to its government contracts in the field of defence and security,” which Harrois points out will be increasingly challenging in the post-Brexit regulatory environment.⁹¹ While significant, the Lancaster House Treaties do not include provisions for any force commitments beyond that required by NATO’s Article 5.⁹²

c. The Future of EU Defense Agreements

Outside of NATO, there remains a great deal of uncertainty about the future of defense cooperation between the UK and European Union (EU). Despite detailed negotiations on trade and regulations between the two parties, there have been no serious talks over the future of British bilateral cooperation with the EU defense structure. Beyond

⁸⁸ “The North Atlantic Treaty,” NATO, accessed August 27, 2021, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm.

⁸⁹ Timothy A. Sayle, *Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Postwar Global Order*, Kindle Edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 241–50.

⁹⁰ Thibaud Harrois, “Franco-British Defence and Security Cooperation after Brexit: An Exception in Europe,” *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique. French Journal of British Studies* XXV, no. 4 (August 22, 2020): 4–5, <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.6582>.

⁹¹ Great Britain Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the French Republic for Defence and Security Co-Operation: London, 02 November 2010* (London: The Stationery Office, 2011), 7–8; Harrois, “Franco-British Defence and Security Cooperation after Brexit,” 5.

⁹² “The North Atlantic Treaty”; Great Britain Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the French Republic for Defence and Security Co-Operation*; Great Britain Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the French Republic Relating to Joint Radiographic/Hydrodynamics Facilities: London, 02 November 2010* (London: The Stationery Office, 2012).

participation in Operation Atalanta (discussed below), it appears that NATO will be the primary vehicle for British defense cooperation with the continent.⁹³

4. Recurring Mission: Black Sea Patrols

RN has also sent intermittent patrols to the Black Sea with some regularity. Schneider suggests that, during its membership in the EU, the UK was a leading force behind the EU's Black Sea policy.⁹⁴ British strategists see Black Sea deployments as a tool to respond to and counter Russian aggression in other regions.⁹⁵ The latest defense review refers to the Black Sea as one of NATO's flanks, and—without many specifics—reaffirms plans to increase military commitment to freedom of navigation and to the region in general.⁹⁶

B. ALLIED COMMITMENTS BEYOND EUROPE

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO's operational commitments have expanded beyond the borders of Europe. In addition to NATO, there are other allies and partners that merit consideration. The increased complexity of deploying and sustaining ships beyond the European neighborhood adds a unique character to these commitments.

1. Standing Missions

The following section details the RN's ongoing operations with allies beyond the Euro-Atlantic region.

⁹³ Aleksandra Koziol, "Prospects for EU-UK Security Cooperation," *The Polish Institute of International Affairs* 96, no. 1792 (May 11, 2021): 2; Chalmers, "The Integrated Review."

⁹⁴ Alex D Schneider, "U.S. and NATO Naval Engagement with Russia in the Black Sea: Historical Patterns and Current Prospects" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2016), 75–76, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/50477>.

⁹⁵ Schneider, 24.

⁹⁶ Her Majesty's Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 20, 29.

a. *Combined Maritime Forces*

The simply named “Combined Maritime Forces” (CMF) represents one of the largest and most active standing multilateral naval structures outside of NATO. With 34 member nations and commanded from U.S. Navy Fifth Fleet headquarters, the CMF conducts counter-piracy operations and works to maintain maritime security in and around the Persian Gulf. The British Royal Navy maintains the Deputy Commander position in the CMF, demonstrating the significance of the British role in the organization.⁹⁷

b. *Operation Kipion*

Operation Kipion is the largest standing deployment of RN forces. Based in Bahrain, the force typically contains at least one frigate or destroyer, four MCM vessels, and a pair of support ships from the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. The ships of Operation Kipion work closely with the Combined Maritime Forces.⁹⁸

c. *Operation Atalanta*

Despite taking place definitively east of Suez, Operation Atalanta is a European project. It represents the European Union’s counter-piracy mission in the Indian Ocean and around the Horn of Africa.⁹⁹ The UK is expected to continue participating in this operation as a non-EU member. Much like the NATO standing forces, this mission rotates between member state assets and only intermittently requires active RN participation.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ “Combined Maritime Forces (CMF),” Combined Maritime Forces, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/>.

⁹⁸ “Operation Kipion,” Royal Navy, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/red-sea-and-gulf/operation-kipion>.

⁹⁹ “Operation Atalanta,” Royal Navy, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/indian-ocean/atalanta>.

¹⁰⁰ European Union Naval Force Somalia, “Deployed Assets,” EUNAVFOR, accessed September 3, 2021, <https://eunavfor.eu/deployed-units/surface-vessels/>.

d. HADR

Although humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HADR) is not a full-time mission, the RN routinely contributes to HADR operations around the world. Examples include Operation Patwin (Philippines) in 2013, HMS *Wave Knight*'s relief efforts in response to the 2021 earthquake in Haiti, and HMS *Spey*'s support of Tonga following the volcanic eruption in 2022.¹⁰¹

2. Treaty Obligation: The Five Power Defense Arrangements

The Five Power Defense Arrangements (FPDA) between the UK, Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Singapore is Britain's largest treaty commitment beyond Europe. However, based on its colonial and commonwealth roots, it will be further explored in a later section.

3. Exercises

a. Rim of the Pacific

Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) is the largest recurring naval exercise in the world and the RN's most significant recurring exercise commitment east of Suez. The exercise occurs every two years, with RN participation varying from year to year.¹⁰² Given the renewed strategic focus on the Indo-Pacific, increasing numbers of RN forces can be expected to participate in 2022.

¹⁰¹ "Patwin," Royal Navy, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/pacific/patwin>; "Wave Knight Keeps International Relief Effort 'on Mission' in Haiti," Royal Navy, accessed August 30, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2021/august/27/20210826-germinal-ras>; "HMS Spey Delivers Crucial Aid to Tonga Following Devastating Tsunami," Royal Navy, accessed February 18, 2022, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2022/january/26/20220126-spey-in-tonga>.

¹⁰² "RimPac," Royal Navy, accessed August 27, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/pacific/rimpac>.

b. Saif Sareea

Exercise Saif Sareea is a recurring bilateral exercise in support of the long-standing British alliance with Oman. Although primarily a land-based exercise, it does incorporate the Royal Navy. Most recently, four RN ships and two fleet auxiliaries participated in the exercise.¹⁰³

4. The Tilt to Asia

A major focus of the 2021 *Integrated Review* is the “tilt to the Indo-Pacific.”¹⁰⁴ Britain aims to develop “a greater and more persistent presence [in the Indo-Pacific] than any other European country.”¹⁰⁵ Examples of this presence have been seen with the large-scale 2021 multilateral exercises as part of the *Queen Elizabeth* deployment.¹⁰⁶ Authors such as Bond have criticized this move, arguing that European security should be prioritized over the Indo-Pacific.¹⁰⁷ Matovski questions whether the move is at least partially motivated by a desire to regain some element of an imperial identity.¹⁰⁸ In any event, the policy represents a partial reversal of the east of Suez decisions made in the Cold War era.

¹⁰³ “Saif Sareea,” Royal Navy, accessed August 27, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/red-sea-and-gulf/saif-sareea>.

¹⁰⁴ Her Majesty’s Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 60.

¹⁰⁵ Her Majesty’s Government and Ministry of Defence, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*, 62.

¹⁰⁶ “UK, Netherlands, United States and Japan Complete Intensive Joint Exercises in the Pacific,” Royal Navy, August 25, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2021/august/25/210825-pacific-exercises-for-carrier-strike-group>.

¹⁰⁷ Ian Bond, “Can the UK Be Secure If Europe Is Not? The UK’s (Un)Integrated Review” (London, UK: Centre for European Reform, April 28, 2021), 1–4.

¹⁰⁸ Aleksandar Matovski, “British Geopolitics and Strategic Culture” (Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, April 27, 2021).

C. COMMITMENTS TO THE COMMONWEALTH AND OVERSEAS TERRITORIES

Although these strategic commitments could be considered “allied commitments beyond Europe,” they are sufficiently unique to deserve their own discussion. Britain’s commitments to the Commonwealth, Overseas Territories, and sovereign base areas are unique in that they are colonial artifacts, often divorced from present-day strategic rationality. They typically involve small, geographically dispersed territories that do not require significant peacetime force commitments but must still be considered in strategic calculations. In other cases, these territories provide useful, distributed basing opportunities.

1. Standing Missions: Atlantic Patrol Tasking North and South

Atlantic Patrol Tasking North is a continuous mission composed of a single ship (often an amphibious landing ship) operating in the North Atlantic and Caribbean. It serves to show the flag, counter drug trafficking, engage in maritime exercises with allies, protect shipping, and be on-call for disaster relief operations.¹⁰⁹

Atlantic Patrol Tasking South is a slightly more ambitious endeavor. Like its northern counterpart, this is a continuous mission typically supported by an Offshore Patrol Vessel and frigate in addition to support vessels as required. Its mission is broadly the same as Patrol Tasking North; however, the British South Atlantic territories are more remote and disperse, requiring more vessels to patrol.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ “Atlantic Patrol Tasking North,” Royal Navy, accessed August 13, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/north-atlantic/atlantic-patrol-tasking-north>.

¹¹⁰ “Atlantic Patrol Tasking South,” Royal Navy, accessed August 13, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/south-atlantic/atlantic-patrol-tasking-south>.

2. Treaty Obligations

a. Five Power Defence Arrangements

Of the Commonwealth defense commitments, the “Five Power Defence Arrangements” is the closest to a balanced, traditional treaty structure. Members include the UK, Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Singapore. It replaced the Anglo-Malaysian Defense Agreement in 1971, with the stated goal of shifting Britain from leader to coequal member. This removed the UK’s broad-spectrum responsibility for defending the junior partners and shifted the preponderance of self-defense responsibilities to the individual states.¹¹¹ The Arrangements are non-binding and merely provide for the consultation between governments in the event of an attack.¹¹²

In practice, the FPDA is intended for the UK, Australia, and New Zealand to support the defense of Singapore and Malaysia. Of those three members, Australia has had the largest military footprint within the organization.¹¹³ The UK did not even participate in exercises for several years during the 1980s.¹¹⁴ An editorial by Graham suggests that the FPDA only requires as much commitment from the UK as it chooses to provide.¹¹⁵ In this interpretation, the recent British commitment to a “bigger and more consistent contribution” is a convenient excuse for greater presence in the Indo-Pacific—an obligation of convenience.¹¹⁶

b. Overseas Territories and Sovereign Base Areas

Finally, the RN has a responsibility to defend the remainder of its outlying territories and base areas. There are very few of these remaining outside of the Atlantic,

¹¹¹ Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez*, 225.

¹¹² Carlyle A Thayer, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Quiet Achiever,” *Security Challenges* 3, no. 1 (2007): 79.

¹¹³ Euan Graham, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements at 50: What Next?” International Institute for Strategic Studies, December 10, 2020, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/12/five-power-defence-arrangements>.

¹¹⁴ Thayer, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Quiet Achiever,” 95.

¹¹⁵ Graham, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements at 50.”

¹¹⁶ Graham; Her Majesty’s Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 31.

and no standing naval missions currently dedicated to their defense.¹¹⁷ Those within the Atlantic are provided for by the Atlantic Patrol Tasking missions.

3. Exercises: The FPDA and Bersama Lima

As part of the FPDA mentioned previously, the RN is notionally a participant in exercise Bersama Lima. However, its actual level of participation has been variable throughout the Arrangements' history.¹¹⁸ Royal Navy participation in FPDA exercises typically amounts to a destroyer or small task force for a few days per year, meaning that increasing this commitment will not likely strain the RN as long as it does maintain some footprint in the region.¹¹⁹

4. New Defence Review Plans

The 2021 *Integrated Review* reaffirms several overseas commitments. These include unspecified levels of resources invested in British Gibraltar and the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas. It also promises that the “armed forces will...maintain a permanent presence in the Falkland Islands, Ascension Island and the British Indian Ocean Territory; and a permanent maritime presence in the Atlantic and Caribbean,” with the latter commitment specifying an emphasis on counter-narcotics and humanitarian operations.¹²⁰ The distinction made between “permanent presence” and “permanent maritime presence” is noted, especially in light of the fact that the Falkland Islands are excluded from the “maritime presence” despite having plans to base an OPV there. The majority of these naval commitments appear to be notionally met by the Atlantic Patrol Tasking vessels.

A novel addition to the fleet employment is a plan to permanently base an OPV in the Falklands, Caribbean, and Gibraltar. This represents an addition (rather than redistribution) of force commitments. Although OPVs are admittedly relatively low-cost

¹¹⁷ Territories beyond the Atlantic: British Indian Ocean Territory, Pitcairn Islands, and Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas.

¹¹⁸ Thayer, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Quiet Achiever,” 95.

¹¹⁹ Thayer, 94.

¹²⁰ Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 71.

vessels, this plan does represent a significant increase in the Atlantic forces and the only permanent British offshore warship presence in the Mediterranean. There is also mention of permanently basing an OPV east of Suez, although the exact nature of this mission was not specified in the 2021 *Defence in a Competitive Age* report.¹²¹

The RN is also developing a concept called the Littoral Response Group, which it defines as “a bespoke force assigned to a geographical area, that contains dedicated shipping, helicopters and boats.”¹²² Although it is unclear what the exact force composition of these groups will be, previous proof of concept deployments have included two amphibious vessels and a destroyer.¹²³ The RN plans to integrate these forces with the JEF construct and complete an Indo-Pacific deployment in 2023.¹²⁴

D. CONCLUSION

This overview of Britain’s naval commitments summarizes the requirements the RN presently faces. Only with an understanding of these requirements can the RN’s capabilities be appropriately evaluated. Despite the significant fanfare surrounding the *Queen Elizabeth* carrier strike group’s deployment to the Indo-Pacific, it remains clear that the RN is still heavily weighted towards the European/NATO front. The tilt to the Indo-Pacific resurrects an issue which the UK first realized in the 1960s, namely that it is difficult to project global influence when your allies prioritize continental Europe and expect equivalent burden-sharing.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, Britain maintains its goal of being the

¹²¹ It was later announced that HMS *Spey* and *Tamar* would be forward deployed to the Indo-Pacific, but without a permanent homeport for the time being. Her Majesty’s Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 49; “Patrol Ships Bid Farewell to Portsmouth as They Begin Indo-Pacific Deployment,” accessed February 18, 2022, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2021/september/07/210907-spey-and-tamar-deploy>.

¹²² Her Majesty’s Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 69.

¹²³ Harry Lye, “Royal Navy Littoral Response Group Experimentation Gets Underway,” *Naval Technology*, September 15, 2020, <https://www.naval-technology.com/news/littoral-response-group-experimentation/>.

¹²⁴ Her Majesty’s Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 48.

¹²⁵ Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez*, 38.

leading European NATO member while simultaneously expanding east of Suez.¹²⁶ Fortunately for the Royal Navy, several of its strategic commitments do not require a permanent naval presence. Ships are—at the moment—assigned in terms of individual regional deployments. Exercises in particular can facilitate naval diplomacy without a permanent regional force commitment. The following chapters will evaluate the Royal Navy’s capabilities in relation to these commitments.

¹²⁶ Her Majesty’s Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 6.

Table 1. Summary of Royal Navy Force Commitments¹²⁷

Commitment	Continuous/ Intermittent	OPV	MCM	FFG	DDG	CV	SSBN	Amphib	Auxiliary
Fleet Ready Escort	Continuous			1	*				
Fisheries Protection	Continuous	4							
CASD	Continuous		1	1			4		
CMF/Kipion	Continuous		4	*	*			*	1
Atlantic Patrol Tasking	Continuous	1		1				1	1
Overseas OPV Deployments	Continuous	4							
Carrier Strike Group	(Ideally) Continuous			1	1	1			1
NATO Standing Naval Forces	Intermittent		*	*	*				
JEF/UK-Netherlands Force	Intermittent		*	*	*			*	
BALTOPS	Intermittent			*	*			*	*
Joint Warrior	Intermittent			*	*			*	*
Black Sea Patrols	Intermittent				1				
Atalanta	Intermittent			*	*				*
Saif Sareea	Intermittent		*	*	*			*	*
FPDA	Intermittent	*		*	*			*	*
RIMPAC	Intermittent			*	*	*		*	*
Littoral Response Group	Intermittent				1			2	*
*Variable quantities									

¹²⁷ Derived from Chapter II, with emphasis on the Royal Navy's official website. When specific quantities of ships are not stated, numbers have been extrapolated from historical precedent. "Homepage," Royal Navy, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/>; Lye, "Royal Navy Littoral Response Group Experimentation Gets Underway"; NATO, "Maritime Groups"; Comptroller and Auditor General, "Carrier Strike – Preparing for Deployment" (National Audit Office, June 26, 2020), 15; Francois, Hansard (Commons), 27 January 2014, cols. 414W-415W; Allison, "What Is the Purpose of the Towed Array Patrol Ship?"; Schneider, "U.S. and NATO Naval Engagement with Russia in the Black Sea: Historical Patterns and Current Prospects," 75–76; Her Majesty's Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 49.

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III. BRITAIN'S CURRENT NAVY

The Fleet ... is certainly the most formidable force in all its elements and qualities that has ever been brought together, and such as no combination of other powers can rival. It is at once the most powerful and far-reaching weapon which the world has ever seen.

—*The Times*,
25 June 1897¹²⁸

While Chapter II discussed commitments, this chapter will detail capabilities. The Royal Navy has changed significantly since the *Times* wrote the above description during the 1897 Spithead Review. The intent of this chapter is to establish an understanding of the Royal Navy's present-day platforms and their abilities. This, in turn, will inform the limits of their current employment as well as provide a baseline for comparing the proposed fleet changes discussed in Chapter IV.

A. CAPABILITIES

Table 2 displays the RN's current fleet composition. Quantities include both active and reserve vessels, although only the auxiliaries are placed in reserve in any significant quantity.

¹²⁸ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, 205.

Table 2. Royal Navy Order of Battle, July 2021 ¹²⁹

Platform		Class	Quantity
Submarines	SSBN	<i>Vanguard</i>	4
	SSN	<i>Trafalgar</i>	2
	SSN	<i>Astute</i>	4
Carriers	CV	<i>Queen Elizabeth</i>	2
DDGHM	Type 45	<i>Daring</i>	6
FFGHM	Type 23	<i>Duke</i>	13
Amphib	LSD	<i>Bay</i>	3
	LPD	<i>Albion</i>	2
MCM	MHC	<i>Hunt</i>	8
	MHC	<i>Sandown</i>	5
Patrol	OPV	<i>River</i>	9
	Patrol	<i>Archer</i>	16
	Patrol	<i>Scimitar</i>	2
Auxiliaries	Supply	<i>Wave</i>	2
	Supply	<i>Tide</i>	4
	Supply	<i>Fort</i>	3
	Hospital	<i>Argus</i>	1
	Icebreaker	<i>Protector</i>	1
	Survey	<i>Echo</i>	2
	Survey	<i>Magpie</i>	1
	Survey	<i>Scott</i>	1

To better contextualize this fleet capability, a brief overview of each class will be provided. These will not detail every technical detail, but instead will provide a broad idea of which mission areas each platform is capable of.

1. Submarines

The *Vanguard* class ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) are Britain's sole nuclear deterrent via the "Continuous at-Sea Deterrent" mission.¹³⁰ This strategic weapon system

¹²⁹ Adapted from Janes, "Pennant List – United Kingdom."

¹³⁰ "Continuous At Sea Deterrent."

also represents one of the largest single expenses in the defense budget (approximately six percent as of 2021).¹³¹

The *Trafalgar* and *Astute* class attack submarines (SSN) fill the more traditional submarine warfare roles. These include anti-submarine warfare (ASW), surface warfare (SW), and strike missions. They are armed primarily with *Spearfish* heavyweight torpedoes and Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles.¹³² Of the two, only the *Astute* class is still in production.¹³³

2. Carriers

The RN's carrier forces consist of two *Queen Elizabeth* class conventionally powered carriers (CV). The primary weapons system is the F-35 Lightning II strike fighter. It can carry up to 40 of the aircraft, but more often will be loaded with 24 F-35s and a variety of helicopters. These can include Merlins, Wildcats, Apaches, and Chinooks (with the latter two focused towards an amphibious support/LPH role).¹³⁴ Currently, the RN is only fielding its F-35s with air-to-air missiles (AIM-120/132) and the Paveway IV GPS-guided bombs.¹³⁵ Work is ongoing to adapt the European "Meteor" air-to-air missile and the "Spear" ground-attack missile to the F-35B.¹³⁶ These weapons support air warfare (AW), strike, and anti-ship (SW) capabilities.

¹³¹ Ministry of Defence, "Dreadnought Submarine Programme: Factsheet," Government, gov.uk, March 16, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/successor-submarine-programme-factsheet/successor-submarine-programme-factsheet>.

¹³² "Astute Class (SSN)," Janes Fighting Ships, July 6, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/JFS_3412-JFS_; Janes, "Trafalgar Class (SSN)," Janes Fighting Ships, April 13, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/JFS_3413-JFS_.

¹³³ "Pennant List – United Kingdom."

¹³⁴ "Queen Elizabeth Class," Janes Fighting Ships, April 13, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/jfs_5693-jfs_.

¹³⁵ "Lockheed Martin F-35B Lightning II," Janes Fighting Ships, April 13, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/JFS_B818-JFS_.

¹³⁶ Andrew Chuter, "Two Reasons Britain Could Slow Its Purchase of the F-35," *Defense News*, June 23, 2021, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/06/23/two-reasons-britain-could-slow-its-purchase-of-the-f-35/>.

3. Destroyers

The *Daring* class, also known as the Type 45 destroyer, is the RN's primary air defense platform and multi-mission surface combatant. It possesses Harpoon anti-ship missiles and a 4.5-inch gun for SW. AW capability is provided by the *Aster* family of missiles and a sophisticated radar suite. ASW capability is perhaps the most limited, with a bow-mounted sonar array and the potential to equip vertically launched torpedoes, but no dedicated torpedo tubes. The ships are also capable of embarking either one Merlin or two Wildcat helicopters.¹³⁷ Both airframes can support ASW and SW missions, but the Merlin serves primarily in an ASW role while the Wildcats are specialized for SW.¹³⁸ The Type 45s are modern and capable multi-mission warships.

4. Frigates

In contrast to the Type 45, the Type 23 *Duke* class frigates are a more narrowly focused ASW and SW platform. They are armed with the same Harpoon missiles and guns, but air defense is limited to the shorter range "Sea Ceptor" missiles and point defenses. ASW capability is more robust, however, with both bow and towed array sonar as well as dedicated launchers for lightweight torpedoes. These frigates can embark either one Merlin or one Wildcat helicopter, enhancing either its ASW or SW capabilities as discussed above.¹³⁹ The ASW focus of these ships is emphasized by their employment as towed array patrol ships in support of the Continuous at-Sea Deterrent mission.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ "Daring Class (Type 45)," Janes Fighting Ships, November 23, 2020, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/jfs_4494-jfs_.

¹³⁸ "Westland/Agusta Merlin HM Mk 2," Janes Fighting Ships, April 13, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/JFS_3425-JFS_; Janes, "AgustaWestland AW159 Wildcat HMA Mk 2/AW159 Wildcat AH Mk 1," Janes Fighting Ships, April 13, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/JFS_B645-JFS_.

¹³⁹ "Duke Class (Type 23) (FFGHM)," Janes Fighting Ships, July 8, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/JFS_3421-JFS_.

¹⁴⁰ Allison, "What Is the Purpose of the Towed Array Patrol Ship?"

5. Amphibious Ships

The *Bay* and *Albion* class ships represent Britain's dedicated amphibious capability (the *Queen Elizabeths* can serve in an amphibious support role, but is not dedicated to that mission).¹⁴¹ Of these, the *Albion* ships are slightly larger and provide more specialized command and control facilities.¹⁴² They are all equipped with large helicopter-capable flight decks and well decks for use with the RN's LCU Mk.10 landing craft.¹⁴³ The ships are also well suited to the HADR mission.

6. Land-Based Aircraft

Britain's land-based naval aviation consists of support helicopters and a fleet of five P-8 Poseidon patrol aircraft. The P-8 (technically operated by the RAF but performing a maritime role) provides SW and ASW capability via its sensor package and air-launched torpedoes or anti-ship missiles.¹⁴⁴

7. Mine Countermeasure Forces

The *Hunt* and *Sandown* class minehunters are equipped with the SeaFox mine neutralization system and mine-hunting sonar.¹⁴⁵ Two of the thirteen vessels have been decommissioned, with experimental unmanned MCM vessels currently being tested.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ "Queen Elizabeth Class."

¹⁴² "Hansard (Commons), 21 November 2017, Vol. 631," (2017), cols. 297WH-323WH, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2017-11-21/debates/5D9E11B2-84F4-4EAA-AB26-89792D8382A9/UKAmphibiousCapability>.

¹⁴³ "Bay Class Landing Ships Dock (Auxiliary)," Janes Fighting Ships, April 13, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/jfs_5259-jfs_; "Albion Class," Janes Fighting Ships, April 13, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/jfs_3440-jfs_.

¹⁴⁴ "Boeing P-8A Poseidon MRA 1," Janes Fighting Ships, April 13, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/JFS_C825-JFS_; "United Kingdom - Navy," 42.

¹⁴⁵ "United Kingdom - Navy," 24–25.

¹⁴⁶ Ministry of Defence, "New Autonomous Minesweepers to Protect Sailors at Sea," gov.uk, January 19, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-autonomous-minesweepers-to-protect-sailors-at-sea>; Martin Manaranche, "The Royal Navy Decommissioned Two Sandown-Class Minehunters," *Naval News*, August 5, 2021, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/08/the-royal-navy-decommissioned-two-sandown-class-minehunters/>; "United Kingdom - Navy," 36.

8. Patrol Forces

The *River*, *Archer*, and *Scimitar* class vessels make up the RN's patrol forces. Of these, the *River* class Offshore Patrol Vessels are the only open-ocean capable vessels. Armed with small and medium caliber guns, they are mainly intended to support law enforcement activities and maintain an RN presence in remote territories.¹⁴⁷

9. Auxiliaries

The RN's logistics fleet is operated by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA). In addition to more specialist noncombatant vessels, the RFA includes four *Tide*, three *Fort* and two *Wave* class supply ships. Of these, only one *Wave* and one *Fort* class ship are in active service, with the remainder in inactive reserve. The ships are capable of replenishing RN and allied vessels at sea; however, the *Fort* class is the only one capable of resupplying significant quantities of dry stores.¹⁴⁸ The dry cargo capability or "Fleet Solid Support" (FSS) has remained a contentious issue in policy debates, with arguments about foreign versus domestic contracting introducing delays to actual construction.¹⁴⁹

B. LIMITATIONS

Despite its long list of capabilities, the present-day RN also faces several limitations. These include the overall quantity of ships available, their logistic support capacity, airborne early warning systems, increasingly sophisticated naval competition, and the perennial challenges posed by the lifecycle maintenance of a fleet.

¹⁴⁷ "River Class Batch I," Janes Fighting Ships, April 13, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/jfs_5257-jfs_.

¹⁴⁸ "Pennant List – United Kingdom."

¹⁴⁹ "Hansard (Commons), 11 July 2019, Vol. 663," accessed October 5, 2021, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-07-11/debates/E8832F05-5CEE-4ABE-A9D1-B56FBA2EA3D9/NationalShipbuildingStrategy>; Axe, "Britain Spent So Much On Two Giant Aircraft Carriers, It Can't Afford Planes Or Escorts."

1. Order of Battle

Chief among the Royal Navy's current challenges are the absolute numbers of vessels available. Single-digit inventories of most platforms limit the scope of potential employment. This limitation is exacerbated by maintenance and training requirements, further reducing the size of the fleet available for tasking.

Modern warships are high-maintenance machines, and the crews require significant individual and collective training in order to perform well. These limitations have led most modern navies (during peacetime) to cycle their fleets through maintenance, training, and operational cycles, with a targeted percentage of the ships in each class available for mission tasking at any given time. It is important to consider this practice when evaluating operational commitments, because attempting to exceed the tempo dictated by maintenance and training cycles can result in materiel and training deficiencies that are counterproductive or even disastrous.¹⁵⁰ Some efficiencies can be created by rotating crews (as the RN is doing in the Arabian Gulf and Indo-Pacific), but that policy is not a universally accepted best-practice.¹⁵¹ Table 3 displays the RN's availability goals by class.

¹⁵⁰ For example, these same faults were assessed as contributing factors in the 2017 collision of USS *Fitzgerald*, a high-tempo, forward deployed USN ship. "Report on the Collision between USS FITZGERALD (DDG 62) and Motor Vessel ACX CRYSTAL" (Washington, DC: Memorandum for Distribution, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, 2017), 20–22.

¹⁵¹ John Cordle, "Good Riddance to Rotational Crews," *U.S. Naval Institute*, June 2017, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2017/june/good-riddance-rotational-crews>; "UK Warship Passes 1,000-Day Milestone Keeping Middle East Sea Lanes Open," Royal Navy, accessed January 11, 2022, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2022/january/05/20220105-hms-montrose-1000-days>; Royal Navy, "Patrol Ships Bid Farewell to Portsmouth as They Begin Indo-Pacific Deployment."

Table 3. Royal Navy Ship Availability by Class¹⁵²

Class	Availability
Type 45 DDG	50%
Type 23 FFG	67%
<i>River</i> Class OPV	100%
<i>Tide</i> Class Auxiliary	75%
<i>Wave</i> Class Auxiliary	50%
<i>Bay</i> Class LSD	67%
<i>Sandown</i> Class MCM	71%
<i>Hunt</i> Class MCM	67%
HMS <i>Albion</i> /HMS <i>Bulwark</i>	50%

For example, the six Type 45 *Daring* ships are the only primary air defense units available. With half of them occupied by maintenance or training at any given time, there is limited strength to both form an effective carrier escort and to escort other valuable units such as amphibious assault ships. As soon as the fleet suffers losses, the situation would quickly become untenable.¹⁵³ In one case (July 2018–July 2019), only two of the Type 45s were at sea for more than 100 days out of the calendar year.¹⁵⁴ In early 2022, all six of the destroyers were in port simultaneously, with several undergoing propulsion

¹⁵² Adapted from: House of Commons Defence Committee, *We're Going to Need a Bigger Navy*, 43.

¹⁵³ Robert Courts, “Hansard (Commons), 28 February 2019, Vol. 655,” cols. 214WH-216WH, accessed October 5, 2021, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-02-28/debates/D95EC68B-21B4-44DD-90FA-C2EA46747776/CarrierStrikeStrategy>.

¹⁵⁴ Kevan Jones, “Hansard (Commons), 3 February 2020, Vol. 671,” col. 5, accessed October 5, 2021, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-02-03/debates/7A18FBEA-F4B3-49A3-80B7-298866B103F2/FrigatesAndDestroyers>.

maintenance related to the engine issues plaguing the Type 45 design.¹⁵⁵ In addition to maintenance, personnel retention in critical specialties have made keeping the Type 45s at sea an ongoing challenge.¹⁵⁶ These concerns have been raised in the media as well as in Parliament.¹⁵⁷

There are practical examples of these limits to RN fleet capacity. The highly vaunted *Queen Elizabeth* CSG deployment in 2021 included USS *The Sullivans*, and based on published media and the CSG composition, it appears that the American ship was taking the lead on air defense and coordinating the employment of the RN's carrier aircraft.¹⁵⁸ Such role sharing is not necessarily a knock against the RN's capabilities. On at least one other occasion roles have been reversed, with RN ships providing the lead air defense role for an American carrier.¹⁵⁹ More likely, however, it is a reaffirmation that the RN's fleet of Type 45s is stretched too thin. Similarly, the strike group deployed with a mixture of British and American operated F-35s.¹⁶⁰ This deployment caused members of the British

¹⁵⁵ Henry Jones, "All Six Royal Navy Destroyers in Port amid Heightened Tensions with Russia," *The Independent*, February 7, 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/royal-navy-ministry-of-defence-russia-pip-tobias-ellwood-b2009369.html>.

¹⁵⁶ "Hansard (Commons), 10 July 2017, Vol. 627," cols. 11–12, accessed November 24, 2021, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-07-10/debates/2B6AF358-DF82-477A-95FB-0A3FFA7DF2D2/ArmedForcesPay#11>.

¹⁵⁷ Axe, "Britain Spent So Much On Two Giant Aircraft Carriers, It Can't Afford Planes Or Escorts"; "Hansard (Commons), 8 February 2017, Vol. 621," cols. 153WH-176WH, accessed October 5, 2021, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2017-02-08/debates/A4147D78-2199-4441-A45B-03C3359DD27D/NationalShipbuildingStrategy>.

¹⁵⁸ *Protecting HMS Queen Elizabeth: On The US Destroyer USS The Sullivans*, 5:10, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnAz38eYYZM>.

¹⁵⁹ HMS *Dauntless*, with the USS *Carl Vinson* strike group in 2015. Adrian Fryer, "'Falklands/Malvinas Conflict of 1982' Strategic Setting Lecture (CDE 8160M)" (Naval War College, Newport, RI, 2019).

¹⁶⁰ Ben Wallace, "Hansard (Commons), 26 April 2021, Vol. 693," (2021), cols. 68–72, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2021-04-26/debates/B031A667-3FCC-47C9-8185-4BA6A6B8AF9A/CarrierStrikeGroupDeployment>.

Parliament to express their concerns that the RN was too dependent on the United States for any operational employment.¹⁶¹

2. Logistics

Similar concerns have been raised about the Royal Fleet Auxiliary's supply ships. Of the nine available, only the *Fort* class is equipped to resupply dry stores in significant quantity.¹⁶² Of those, only one of the three is in active service.¹⁶³ A 2020 report by the National Audit Office assessed that three dry stores ships would be required to support RN carrier deployments at desired capacity.¹⁶⁴ In October 2021, it was announced that the *Fort Austin* and *Fort Rosalie* would be sold to Egypt, while their replacements (the FSS ships) are still in the design and contracting phase.¹⁶⁵ The process of expanding this logistics capability has been halting and inconsistent, with parliamentary debates focusing more on where the ships should be built—and whether the Ministry of Defense can legally give preference to British shipyards—than on bringing the much-needed capability online.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Nick Smith, "Hansard (Commons), 23 March 2021, Vol. 691," col. 812, accessed November 24, 2021, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2021-03-23/debates/D41314B4-1433-4E4D-9653-27DF2719A24B/DefenceAndSecurityIndustrialStrategy>.

¹⁶² "Auxiliaries – United Kingdom," Janes Fighting Ships, April 13, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/JFS_4497-JFS_.

¹⁶³ Axe, "Britain Spent So Much On Two Giant Aircraft Carriers, It Can't Afford Planes Or Escorts."; "Pennant List – United Kingdom."

¹⁶⁴ Comptroller and Auditor General, "Carrier Strike – Preparing for Deployment," 4.

¹⁶⁵ Dan Evans, "DESA Sells Royal Navy Ships to Egypt for First Time in More than 30 Years," Government, Defence Equipment & Support, October 29, 2021, <https://des.mod.uk/rfa-fort-austin-fort-rosalie-desa-sale-egypt/>; Ministry of Defence, "Fleet Solid Support Ships Competition Launched," gov.uk, accessed January 26, 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fleet-solid-support-ships-competition-launched>.

¹⁶⁶ Comptroller and Auditor General, "Carrier Strike – Preparing for Deployment," 8; Hansard (Commons), 11 July 2019, Vol. 663, cols. 205WH-228WH; Axe, "Britain Spent So Much On Two Giant Aircraft Carriers, It Can't Afford Planes Or Escorts"; Andrew Chuter, "Britain Launches \$2.3B Logistics Ship Competition — Again," *Defense News*, May 21, 2021, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/05/21/brits-launch-logistics-ship-competition-again/>.

In some ways this is a less-critical limitation than other fleet shortfalls. It is far more routine (and less diplomatically complicated) for allies to receive stores from one another's oilers than it is to borrow the services of a large surface combatant. The RN can project power without these vessels, on the condition that it has the support of its allies' fleet resupply networks.

Another important note on logistics is the "Ships Taken Up from Trade" (STUFT) program. The program allows the government to commandeer merchant marine vessels for military use. It was used with reasonable success during the Falklands/Malvinas war, in which the RN adapted several commercial vessels into combat cargo, troop transport, and hospital ships in a matter of days.¹⁶⁷ This ability to adapt ships mitigated a significant portion of the logistics challenge faced by the then-shrinking RN and RFA.¹⁶⁸ The commercial-military relationship appears to be unusually strong in Britain and could potentially smooth over shortfalls in auxiliary ships during future conflicts.¹⁶⁹

3. Early Warning Radar

The RN has been heavily investing in the new *Crowsnest* airborne early warning radar but has very little to show for it. Airborne sensors such as this are an important tool for effectively employing aircraft and air defenses out to their maximum effective range as well as maximizing the tactical commander's response time. The system is designed to serve as the fleet's primary airborne surveillance and early warning radar.¹⁷⁰ However, the *Crowsnest* system has faced significant delays.¹⁷¹ Until *Crowsnest* comes fully online, the

¹⁶⁷ Douglas N Hime, "The 1982 Falklands-Malvinas Case Study," Case Study (Newport, RI: United States Naval War College, June 4, 2010).

¹⁶⁸ Hime, 11–12.

¹⁶⁹ Ingram, "Hansard (Commons), 12 January 2004, Vol. 416," col. 539W, accessed November 23, 2021, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2004-01-12/debates/d38047ce-5d0f-40ac-95c7-633973a4ec68/RoyalFleetAuxiliaryOilers>.

¹⁷⁰ Axe, "Britain Spent So Much On Two Giant Aircraft Carriers, It Can't Afford Planes Or Escorts."

¹⁷¹ Comptroller and Auditor General, "Carrier Strike – Preparing for Deployment," 7, 24–28.

RN has a significant vulnerability. A similar capability gap is developing on land, with the retirement of the *Nimrod* system before the E-7 Wedgetail becomes available.¹⁷²

4. Challenges with Power Projection in the Current Environment

Chalmers points out that the environment into which Britain is attempting to project power is more challenging than in the old “east of Suez” days. Western Europe no longer enjoys a significant economic and technological advantage over other regional powers. The RN will need to compete against and deter increasingly advanced near-peer adversaries if it wants to operate in areas such as the Indo-Pacific.¹⁷³

In addition, there are simply limits to how much force a single CSG can reasonably project. Till and Robinson cite the Libyan campaign in 2011 as an example of successful air-sea integration, but their analysis also highlights many of the challenges the coalition faced. Even against a weak and often disloyal Libyan air force, multiple NATO carriers struggled to both launch sufficient sorties (averaging 150 per day despite a goal of 300) and maintain adequate resupply.¹⁷⁴ It seems unlikely that the 24 strike aircraft of an RN carrier strike group would be able to independently support operations ashore in the face of any organized air defense. Against the scale of competition in the Indo-Pacific, the RN will struggle to stand alone.

5. Reactivating Retired Ships

Brexit resulted in some backpedaling from previous force structure decisions. HMS *Severn*, an OPV, was recommissioned in August 2021.¹⁷⁵ The reactivation of

¹⁷² Watling, “A Post Mortem of a Disintegrated Review.”

¹⁷³ Chalmers, “The Integrated Review,” 4.

¹⁷⁴ Geoffrey Till and Martin Robson, “UK Air-Sea Integration in Libya, 2011: A Successful Blueprint For the Future?” Corbett Paper (London: *Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies*, July 2013), 12.

¹⁷⁵ “Second Life Officially Begins for *Severn* after Thames Recommissioning,” Royal Navy, August 28, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2021/august/28/20210828-severn-recommissioned>.

decommissioned (not reserve) ships is a red flag, especially given the government's 2017 commitment to honor the planned end-of-service life of its vessels.¹⁷⁶

C. IMPLICATIONS FOR BRITAIN'S THREE "CIRCLES"

1. Europe and NATO

What does this plan mean for Britain's three major geopolitical circles? Within Europe, the UK remains a naval leader, roughly on par with France and a capable competitor to the Russian fleets in the region.¹⁷⁷ Although the Russian Navy leads the RN in number of major surface combatants (32 versus 21 as of 2017), most of the Russian fleet is approaching obsolescence.¹⁷⁸ The age of Russian vessels is partially offset, however, by upgrades to their weapons systems with sophisticated Russian anti-ship missiles.¹⁷⁹

Also important to the British strategic calculus is the Russian fleet dispersion. The Russian Navy has fleets based in the high north, Baltic, Black Sea, Caspian Sea, and Pacific. This dispersion has been a perennial strategic challenge for Russia and will likely remain so into the future. Of Russia's 32 major surface combatants, the 16 ships of the North and Baltic Fleets could respond promptly to a conflict in Europe, while the 5 ships of the Black Sea Fleet may be trapped by the Montreux Convention if hostilities break out.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Ministry of Defence, *National Shipbuilding Strategy: The Future of Naval Shipbuilding in the UK* (London, UK: Ministry of Defence, 2017).

¹⁷⁷ "France - Navy," Janes, October 25, 2021; Defense Intelligence Agency, *Russia Military Power: Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations* (Washington, D.C.: Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017), <https://www.dia.mil/portals/27/documents/news/military%20power%20publications/russia%20military%20power%20report%202017.pdf>.

¹⁷⁸ Defense Intelligence Agency, *Russia Military Power*, 70.

¹⁷⁹ Defense Intelligence Agency, 67–70.

¹⁸⁰ The Montreux Convention of 1936 governs the transit of vessels through the Bosphorus in both peace and wartime. Broadly speaking, Russian warships have the right to transit the straits unless Turkey is an active belligerent. Therefore, if NATO Article V is invoked in a hypothetical UK/Russian conflict, the Straits would be closed to Russian warships. "Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits" (League of Nations, July 20, 1936), 213–41, <https://treaties.un.org/pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=0800000280166981>; Defense Intelligence Agency, *Russia Military Power*, 69–70.

The major caveat here is the Russian submarine force. In quantity, the Russian submarine fleet still significantly outclasses the British. Fielding 22 SSN/SSGNs and 20 non-nuclear SSKs (primarily the *Kilo* class) against the RN's 6 SSNs and 11 ASW frigates, the Royal Navy's aging ASW capabilities remain at a disadvantage in this arm of naval warfare.¹⁸¹ Britain is certainly a credible contributor to the NATO deterrent, but not yet an independent competitor to Russia at sea.

On a more positive note, the present-day RN and the British military in general has demonstrated an extremely high level of interoperability with other NATO naval forces, including the apparently seamless integration of American air and surface forces into the *Queen Elizabeth* strike group.¹⁸² Such interoperability is not always guaranteed, despite common standards among NATO allies. This capacity serves as a force multiplier for all parties involved and creates a much broader spectrum of choice for strategic policymakers and operational commanders.¹⁸³

2. Alliances Beyond Europe

Britain's commitments beyond Europe appear to be the major decision point. Forces employed outside of Europe may come at the noticeable cost of deterrence in Europe. In theory the fleet is inherently mobile and can support policy in both theatres. But as Britain saw in the buildup to the First World War, reassigning ships away from overseas stations in response to rising tensions at home presents some very difficult dilemmas. The likely result is undermining the deterrent capability in both theaters and the perceived commitment to allies further afield.¹⁸⁴ For the time being, the RN will struggle to maintain credible forces in two hemispheres simultaneously.

¹⁸¹ Defense Intelligence Agency, *Russia Military Power*, 68–69; “Pennant List – United Kingdom.”

¹⁸² *HMS Queen Elizabeth: F-35s, Russians and the Ops Room*, 6:36, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12cKNwWBaVA>.

¹⁸³ Paget, *The Dynamics of Coalition Naval Warfare*; Olivier Schmitt and Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, “The Kosovo Intervention: Coercion by Coalition,” in *Allies That Count: Junior Partners in Coalition Warfare* (Georgetown University Press, 2018), 80–103.

¹⁸⁴ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, chap. 8.

3. The Commonwealth and Overseas Territories

Britain's Overseas Territories appear to neither require nor receive any significant naval support, aside from the OPVs stationed locally. The most significant challenge with these remote, overseas-based ships will come from long-term life cycle maintenance. The ships will require overhaul and drydocking eventually. Their limited endurance and sea-keeping ability means that rotating them out will require either the scarce RFA supply ships or some other logistics arrangement to support the transit home.¹⁸⁵

D. CONCLUSION

The present-day Royal Navy is equipped with the capability to perform any aspect of modern naval warfare. The biggest challenge is in the quantity of ships needed to perform these missions consistently and independently. Warship, supply ship, and crew availability issues limit the ability of the RN to operate beyond its standing naval commitments. Table 4 compares the RNs fleet against its continuous and intermittent commitments. From the table, it appears that the MCM fleet are the only vessels that do not risk being overcommitted when both continuous and intermittent commitments are taken into account. Although not all of these intermittent missions will occur simultaneously, tasking ships to meet these requirements as they arise will impose strain on the frigate, destroyer, and amphibious forces. It is also important to note that the more aggressive operational availability of certain classes (especially the OPVs at 100 percent) may introduce maintenance challenges over the long term. The OPV situation is further complicated by their independent, overseas basing, which makes allocating time for maintenance and training requirements more difficult. For the time being, it appears that the Royal Navy will be stretched thin if it wants to meet its expanded strategic commitments.

¹⁸⁵ "River Class Batch I."

Table 4. Royal Navy Order of Battle vs. Commitments¹⁸⁶

	OPV	MCM	FFG	DDG	CV	Amphib	Supply
Total Ships in Inventory	9	13	13	6	2	5	9
Ships Available for Tasking	9	9	8	3	1	3	4
Continuous Commitments	9	5	4	1	1	1	3
Intermittent Commitments	1	3	8	10	1	8	7

This chapter has addressed the capabilities of the Royal Navy at time of writing. The Chapter IV will address the new variety of ships and systems which the RN plans to procure over the next decade, and whether they will alter the balance of its capabilities versus strategic commitments.

¹⁸⁶ Adapted from Tables 1, 2, and House of Commons Defence Committee, *We're Going to Need a Bigger Navy*, 43. Carrier availability is estimated.

IV. BRITAIN'S NAVY IN 2030

In a post-Brexit world, the need for us to project our influence, to keep reaching out to friends and allies alike, will be more important than ever. That's why we are investing billions in the Royal Navy over the coming decade. Our larger future fleet will include: our two mighty flagships, the Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers; next generation Dreadnought submarines; Type 45 destroyers; and a phalanx of new frigates...

—Michael Fallon,
Secretary of State for Defence, 2017¹⁸⁷

While Chapter III detailed the current state of the Royal Navy, this chapter will discuss its planned future as outlined in the 2021 *Integrated Review*, 2021 Defense publications, and the 2017 National Shipbuilding Strategy. Taking these documents together, it is possible to develop a tentative picture of what the RN will look like in 2030. Although not every government document mentions 2030 specifically, that year was chosen as it is roughly the limit of the currently available, open source, and detailed information on the RN's construction and modernization programs. This chapter will overview planned capability increases, inherent limitations, as well as the numerous challenges which stand between the present and a successful future implementation. The RN should be able to attain a continuous carrier strike group deployment, but this will stretch the availability of its forces.

A. PLANNED FUTURE CAPABILITIES

1. New Ships

a. *The Type 31(e) Frigate*

The new Type 31 frigates are perhaps the most widely discussed upcoming class of ships. Often referred to as the "Type 31e" to signify that they are designed for both domestic use and for export, these ships have been central to debates about the British

¹⁸⁷ Ministry of Defence, *National Shipbuilding Strategy: The Future of Naval Shipbuilding in the UK*, 5.

shipbuilding industry at large.¹⁸⁸ In theory, resale of these ships will help offset their costs. For the Navy's purposes, these ships are intended to fill the role currently held by the Type 23 frigates. Five of the new ships have been ordered over a five-year period. This new design will also create specialization within the frigate classes, with Type 31s performing routine patrol and security tasks while Type 26s (discussed below) serve as escorts for strike groups and SSBNs.¹⁸⁹

The Type 31e is based off the hull of the Danish *Iver-Huitfeldt* class frigates. It is a relatively high-endurance vessel armed with a 5" gun, canister-launched missiles, and a 32-cell vertical launch system (VLS) launcher. It is capable of being fitted with a towed array sonar, torpedo tubes, and one Merlin or two Wildcat helicopters.¹⁹⁰ One of its unique features is the four "boat bays," which are capable of launching traditional small boats or a variety of potential unmanned craft.¹⁹¹ Finally, the Type 31 has reserved space in the form of a "mission bay," which can be configured to support a variety of roles.¹⁹² It is unclear if this space is meant to be modular and swappable, or simply provide options at the time of construction.

b. The Type 26 "Global Combat Ship" (Frigate)

The Type 26 frigate, also known as the *City Class* or "Global Combat Ship," is the RN's new primary ASW frigate design. Eight of the ships are planned, with the intent to replace the Type 23 frigates on a one-for-one basis.¹⁹³ The Type 26 is intended to fill the

¹⁸⁸ Hansard (Commons), 11 July 2019, Vol. 663, cols. 205WH-228WH; Ministry of Defence, *National Shipbuilding Strategy: The Future of Naval Shipbuilding in the UK*, 7, 9, 22–23; Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 102.

¹⁸⁹ Ministry of Defence, *National Shipbuilding Strategy: The Future of Naval Shipbuilding in the UK*, 10.

¹⁹⁰ Tim Fish, "Type-31 Frigate Key to U.K. Royal Navy's Growth," USNI News, September 30, 2021, <https://news.usni.org/2021/09/30/type-31-frigate-key-to-u-k-royal-navys-growth>.

¹⁹¹ Fish.

¹⁹² Fish.

¹⁹³ Ministry of Defence, *National Shipbuilding Strategy: The Future of Naval Shipbuilding in the UK*, 21.

role of a strike group escort and conduct ASW patrols in support of the Continuous at-Sea Deterrent mission.¹⁹⁴ Notably, the Type 26 has been jointly developed and adopted under different names by the Royal Canadian and Royal Australian Navies.¹⁹⁵

In terms of design, the Type 26 is slightly larger than the Type 31 frigate, but with a slightly decreased endurance. Published capabilities include a VLS, 5” gun, hull-mounted and towed array sonar, helicopter capability, and a similar “mission bay.”¹⁹⁶ Forty-eight of the VLS cells are devoted to Sea Ceptor surface-to-air missiles while an additional twenty-four are reserved for mixed payloads.¹⁹⁷

c. The Dreadnought Class Ballistic Missile Submarine

The *Dreadnought* class is the RN’s replacement for the *Vanguard* SSBN. It provides a modernized strategic nuclear capability. Perhaps of equal importance to strategic planners is the cost. The *Dreadnought* program is budgeted for £31 billion (with a £10 billion contingency allowance) over the next decade.¹⁹⁸ These numbers mean that the *Dreadnought* program alone will consume somewhere between 6.4% and 8.5% of the (currently projected) annual defense budget from 2020–2030.¹⁹⁹ This figure represents the submarine development, independent of costs associated with scheduled warhead modernization and stockpile expansion.²⁰⁰ This cost is also in addition to the approximately 6% of the budget devoted to maintenance and operation of the existing

¹⁹⁴ Ministry of Defence, 10.

¹⁹⁵ Her Majesty’s Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 28.

¹⁹⁶ “Global Combat Ship,” BAE Systems, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://www.baesystems.com/en/product/global-combat-ship>; Jonathan Day, “Type 26 Frigates: Navy’s City-Class Explained,” *Forces Network*, June 25, 2021, <https://www.forces.net/news/technology/sea-vessels/what-are-type-26-frigates>.

¹⁹⁷ “City (Type 26) Class,” Janes Fighting Ships, accessed October 15, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.libproxy.nps.edu/FightingShips/Display/jfs_b644-jfs_.

¹⁹⁸ Ministry of Defence, “Dreadnought Submarine Programme: Factsheet.”

¹⁹⁹ Noel Dempsey, “UK Defence Expenditure” (London, UK: House of Commons, November 16, 2021), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8175/>.

²⁰⁰ Chalmers, “The Integrated Review,” 15–16.

Vanguard class SSBNs.²⁰¹ These upgrades are generally considered to be a necessary expense, but they come at the cost of potential spending on other platforms. From the Navy's perspective, it is fortunate that the obsolescence of the older strategic nuclear submarines coincided with a period of permissive naval spending.

d. *The Fleet Solid Support Ships*

Britain has committed to purchasing three additional Fleet Solid Support ships in order to provide ordinance and dry cargo resupply at sea.²⁰² These ships will be vital in allowing the Royal Navy's CSGs to operate independently. The FSS contract process has been politically divisive and significantly delayed.²⁰³ At present, the government is soliciting design bids from UK-based shipbuilders.²⁰⁴

e. *F-35B Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters*

Britain is in the process of adopting the F-35B (STOVL²⁰⁵ variant) Lightning II strike fighter. The current procurement plan is 48 airframes, reduced from an original goal of 138.²⁰⁶ The last of these 48 are to be delivered in 2025.²⁰⁷ The perception of moving procurement goalposts has led to frustration among members of Parliament.²⁰⁸ The official position is that an indeterminate number of additional aircraft (above the 48) will

²⁰¹ Ministry of Defence, "Dreadnought Submarine Programme: Factsheet."

²⁰² Her Majesty's Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 49.

²⁰³ Hansard (Commons), 11 July 2019, Vol. 663, cols. 205WH-228WH.

²⁰⁴ Her Majesty's Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 49; Ministry of Defence, "Fleet Solid Support Ships Competition Launched."

²⁰⁵ Short takeoff, vertical landing

²⁰⁶ Tobias Ellwood, "Hansard (Commons), 9 February 2021, Vol. 689," cols. 249–250, accessed November 16, 2021, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2021-02-09/debates/F4DA588B-A932-451B-A33A-076A6446C6F7/IntegratedReviewOfSecurityDefenceDevelopmentAndForeignPolicy?>; Andrew M. Dorman, "The United Kingdom," in *The Handbook of European Defence Policies and Armed Forces*, ed. Hugo Meijer and Marco Wyss, First edition (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2018), 12.

²⁰⁷ Comptroller and Auditor General, "Carrier Strike – Preparing for Deployment," 7.

²⁰⁸ Ellwood, Hansard (Commons), 9 February 2021, Vol. 689, cols. 249–276.

be ordered in the future, with a decision to be made by 2025.²⁰⁹ These are to be shared by the Royal Air Force (RAF) and RN.²¹⁰ Both services operate off of the British carriers. The *Queen Elizabeth* class carries 24 aircraft in a typical CSG configuration, meaning that between maintenance, training, and land-based demands on the airframes, only one carrier air wing is likely to be available at any given point in time.²¹¹ This use case tracks with a two-to-make-one carrier force generation model but has raised concerns among the British civil leadership about dependence on allied aircraft if both carriers are ever to be operated simultaneously.²¹²

f. The Type 32 Frigate

In addition to these new designs, there are other ship procurement plans that are still in the early phases of design. Reminiscent of the American Littoral Combat Ship, the Type 32 frigates have the stated intent of defending the UK's territorial waters, supporting "persistent presence" overseas, supporting the nascent Littoral Response Group concept, and carrying autonomous mine warfare (MIW) systems.²¹³ These ships are expected to supplement Britain's OPV and MIW forces, rather than serve in a fleet escort role.²¹⁴

g. New Autonomous MIW Capability

Possibly in concert with the Type 32 design, the *Integrated Review* cited plans to develop and deploy a new autonomous MIW capability. The new "Maritime Mine Countermeasures System" consists of uncrewed, 12-meter boats equipped with mine-

²⁰⁹ "Hansard (Commons), 23 March 2021, Vol. 691," col. 812, accessed November 16, 2021, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2021-03-23/debates/D41314B4-1433-4E4D-9653-27DF2719A24B/DefenceAndSecurityIndustrialStrategy>.

²¹⁰ "United Kingdom - Navy," 18.

²¹¹ "Queen Elizabeth Class."

²¹² Hansard (Commons), 26 April 2021, Vol. 693, cols. 67–72; Hansard (Commons), 23 March 2021, Vol. 691.

²¹³ Her Majesty's Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 49; George Allison, "Currently 'Too Early' to Determine Role of Type 32 Frigate," *UK Defence Journal*, July 20, 2021, <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/currently-too-early-to-determine-role-of-type-32-frigate/>.

²¹⁴ Allison, "Currently 'Too Early' to Determine Role of Type 32 Frigate."

detection sonar and a three-shot mine neutralization submersible.²¹⁵ These vessels are complemented by similarly sized autonomous sweep vehicles, intended to conduct magnetic and acoustic minesweeping.²¹⁶ Other European nations are adopting similar systems alongside dedicated mine-countermeasure motherships, but the RN has yet to announce plans to purchase dedicated MCM support vessels.²¹⁷

h. Converting the Bay Class

Another stated intent is the conversion of a *Bay* class amphibious ship “to deliver a more agile and lethal littoral strike capability.”²¹⁸ It remains unclear what these modifications would entail or when they are likely to happen.

i. Designing the Type 83 Destroyer

Finally, the Government has announced the concept and design process for the Type 83 destroyer as a replacement for the Type 45. It remains too early for specifics on the new ships, but the program will likely result in an improved air defense focused multi-mission destroyer.²¹⁹

2. More Ships

Chalmers has pointed out that the current shipbuilding plan is the most ambitious that the RN has pursued in decades. The total plan has been quoted as a 50% increase in tonnage and a doubling of annual shipbuilding investment, with most of that construction bringing new capabilities to the fleet.²²⁰ However, it remains unclear where this new tonnage is supposed to come from, as most new construction (with the exception of the

²¹⁵ “Autonomous Systems – the Future of Royal Navy Mine Warfare,” *Navy Lookout*, May 26, 2021, <https://www.navylookout.com/autonomous-systems-the-future-of-royal-navy-mine-warfare/>.

²¹⁶ Ministry of Defence, “New Autonomous Minesweepers to Protect Sailors at Sea.”

²¹⁷ “Autonomous Systems – the Future of Royal Navy Mine Warfare.”

²¹⁸ Her Majesty’s Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 48.

²¹⁹ Her Majesty’s Government and Ministry of Defence, 50.

²²⁰ Chalmers, “The Integrated Review,” 14.

already commissioned carriers) is replacing existing hulls on a one-for-one basis.²²¹ The option to purchase additional Type 31 frigates following the initial procurement contract is the most likely avenue for a net increase in hulls and tonnage, but whether this option will be pursued remains an open question.²²²

3. Improved Capabilities

In addition to new ships, there are also improvements in the RN's capabilities on the horizon. In late 2020, American Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Gilday described the concept of "interchangeability" as opposed to "interoperability" when working with the RN.²²³ Captain Essenhigh of the HMS *Queen Elizabeth* elaborated on this capability, citing the goal of forces able to operate in "mixed formations against common target sets."²²⁴ In other words, the goal is to allow British and allied platforms to be interchanged without disrupting complex sensor, communication, and weapon networks. Beyond the American aircraft deployed with the *Queen Elizabeth* strike group, the RN has also demonstrated the ability to fire missiles based on targeting information from American unmanned aerial vehicles.²²⁵ These moves point towards more operational flexibility and greater depth of options on the part of allied force commanders in the future.

The new capabilities being brought online by the RN will also improve its freedom of independent action. Till suggests that one unique characteristic of small navies is that

²²¹ Ministry of Defence, *National Shipbuilding Strategy: The Future of Naval Shipbuilding in the UK*, 21–24.

²²² Ministry of Defence, 22.

²²³ Megan Eckstein, "U.S., U.K. Navies Working to Achieve 'Interchangeability' in Carrier Forces, Collaboration on Unmanned and AI," News, USNI News, October 20, 2020, <https://news.usni.org/2020/10/20/u-s-u-k-navies-working-to-achieve-interchangeability-in-carrier-forces-collaboration-on-unmanned-and-ai>.

²²⁴ Eckstein.

²²⁵ "Royal Navy Launches Missile from Autonomous Vessel in NATO Exercise," Royal Navy, October 14, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2021/october/14/211014-madfox-at-nato-exercise>.

they lack “independence of strategic decision.”²²⁶ The RN has been working to maintain this independence as its size has shrunk over the decades. A consistently deployable blue-water CSG serves this end, guaranteeing Britain’s ability to act strategically of its own volition. Germond attempts to synthesize the literature on ranking navies. Without straying too far into the quantitative metrics, the 2020 RN roughly fits into Germond’s “rank 3: Navies able... to perform coastal defense autonomously, and to participate, within coalitions, in limited projection operations.”²²⁷ Contrast this criteria with the plans for sustainable carrier deployments, and a case could be made for the projected future RN falling into rank 4: “Navies able... to [perform] coastal defence autonomously, to conduct limited projection operations autonomously, and to participate, within coalitions, in high intensity projection operations.”²²⁸ The largest difference is in the ability to consistently project and sustain forces for high-intensity operations. The consistent projection will be facilitated by the revitalized escort and auxiliary fleet, while high-intensity operations are made possible by the addition of advanced, fixed-wing strike fighters.

B. LIMITATIONS OF THE PLAN AS CONCEIVED

1. Limited Quantity of Combat Ships

While these new ships will certainly increase the RN’s capabilities, there are still limitations to the future fleet. The absolute quantity of ships is still low, and the tyranny of maintenance and training requirements will continue to limit the number available for tasking. Although the Type 26 is a very capable ship, Type 45s are still the primary air defense platform for carrier strike groups. With no plans to build more of these ships, the six currently in service will be kept extremely busy. The new fleet structure should make continuous carrier strike group operations a possibility, but the utility of a single, 24 strike fighter air wing for sustained regional interventions is limited. The government has

²²⁶ Geoffrey Till, “Are Small Navies Different?” in *Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace*, ed. Michael Mulqueen, Deborah Sanders, and Ian Speller (UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), 23.

²²⁷ Germond, “Small Navies in Perspective: Deconstructing the Hierarchy of Naval Forces,” 42.

²²⁸ Germond, 43.

remained vague about its surface combat ship procurement beyond 2027. Although it is building the new frigate variants, it has only committed to building replacements for the Type 23s scheduled for retirement.²²⁹ Any serious buildup in fleet quantity will only occur after this initial replacement process is complete. Until that happens, the RN will have greater capabilities but not necessarily greater availability.

2. Limited Quantity of Logistics Ships

Furthermore, logistics still appears to be a major weakness for the fleet. The Fleet Solid Support program is several years behind schedule, limiting the RN's ability to independently resupply.²³⁰ This delay is not necessarily a problem in the current political climate—where the RN can supplement its own capacity with allied logistics networks—but becomes a vulnerability if Britain seeks to take a military action without the support of its allies. Similar questions have been raised regarding Britain's more “agile, integrated, lethal and expeditionary” ground forces, at a time when air mobility is being cut.²³¹ With less airlift capacity, naval logistics may be stretched even further to support ground forces.²³²

C. CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING THE 2030 PLAN

1. Capability Gaps

In addition to the limitations of the 2030 fleet plan as designed, there are also some rough seas between today and 2030. Capability gaps will be opened as ships are decommissioned before their replacements are brought online. Two of the current Type 23s have been marked for decommission without replacement.²³³ Frigate/destroyer

²²⁹ Ministry of Defence, *National Shipbuilding Strategy: The Future of Naval Shipbuilding in the UK*, 21–24.

²³⁰ Ministry of Defence, 21; Ministry of Defence, “Fleet Solid Support Ships Competition Launched”; Axe, “Britain Spent So Much On Two Giant Aircraft Carriers, It Can’t Afford Planes Or Escorts.”

²³¹ Her Majesty's Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 52; Watling, “A Post Mortem of a Disintegrated Review.”

²³² Watling, “A Post Mortem of a Disintegrated Review.”

²³³ Hansard (Commons), 8 February 2017, Vol. 621, col. 160.

strength could drop to as low as sixteen by 2026, before new ships are able to reverse the trend.²³⁴ These issues have at least been recognized in government, with stopgap measures such as the re-commissioning of the HMS *Severn* (River class OPV) in 2021 as an attempt to stem the decline. These actions, however, notably conflict with the 2017 commitment to honor ships' planned service lives.²³⁵

2. Funding Challenges

Funding is among the chief risks to the 2030 plan being realized.²³⁶ The plan laid down in the *Integrated Review* includes £1.7 billion invested in shipbuilding industries annually and a total spending of £63 billion over the next decade on ships and submarines generally.²³⁷ This expense accounts for roughly 14% of the annual projected defense budget and may be a significant target for potential future budget cuts.²³⁸ Parker's analysis of British shipbuilding condemns the frequently insecure or volatile funding for long-term government procurement projects.²³⁹ This critique was among many criticisms in the Parker report which the Ministry of Defence acknowledge and have committed to acting on. The National Shipbuilding Strategy cites a "set and assured budget" for the shipbuilding programs, with funding guaranteed for up to four years.²⁴⁰ However, even this is no guarantee that priorities will not shift within the next decade. Jesset et al. argue that the last twenty years have seen the MoD frequently struggling to reconcile long-term force structure or policy goals which are out of step with its annual budget settlement.

²³⁴ David Axe, "The Royal Navy Keeps Shrinking—Frigates To Drop By Three Over Five Years," *Forbes*, February 12, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2021/02/12/the-royal-navy-keeps-shrinking-frigates-to-drop-by-three/>; Fish, "Type-31 Frigate Key to U.K. Royal Navy's Growth."

²³⁵ "Second Life Officially Begins for Severn after Thames Recommissioning."

²³⁶ Koziol, "Prospects for EU-UK Security Cooperation," 2; Parker, "An Independent Report to Inform the UK National Shipbuilding Strategy."

²³⁷ Her Majesty's Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 49; Ministry of Defence, *National Shipbuilding Strategy: The Future of Naval Shipbuilding in the UK*, 9.

²³⁸ Dempsey, "UK Defence Expenditure," 4.

²³⁹ Parker, "An Independent Report to Inform the UK National Shipbuilding Strategy," 4, 9, 14.

²⁴⁰ Ministry of Defence, *National Shipbuilding Strategy: The Future of Naval Shipbuilding in the UK*, 18.

Either policy is made more ambitious without funding to match, or funding is increased without a coherent plan to employ it. Reconciling these discontinuities pulls senior MoD officials away from more productive activities. There is little indication that the current iteration of defense policy planning will be any different.²⁴¹

Dorman points out that just because there are assured plans to fund the shipbuilding, does not mean that other expenses have been adequately accounted for. The new fleet will also require personnel and maintenance, which could potentially see funding shortfalls. Such an issue occurred with the original acquisition of the P-8s and the decision to retain two squadrons of Eurofighter Typhoons, both decisions made without adequate plans to crew or maintain them.²⁴² Personnel availability remains a challenge, with some British military units lacking critical skills to operate their existing equipment.²⁴³

The submarine-launched nuclear deterrent is potentially the most expensive program under the Ministry of Defence. Its current upgrades crowd out a significant share of the budget. Possible cost overruns could force some very painful decisions on the MoD and the government as a whole.²⁴⁴ The risk is exacerbated by the Scottish independence movement, which if successful would force an extremely expensive and politically divisive relocation of the RN's SSBN bases.²⁴⁵

Other funding constraints may fall beyond the government's control—for example, the volatile exchange rate of the Pound Sterling since Brexit risks increasing the cost of foreign-built hardware. Continued procurement of the F-35 is vital to the RN's carrier

²⁴¹ Jessett, McKane, and Watkins, "Five Tests for the Integrated Review," 25–30.

²⁴² Dorman, "The United Kingdom," 12.

²⁴³ James Goldrick, "The Royal Navy Has a Problem," *War on the Rocks*, October 17, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/10/the-royal-navy-has-a-problem/>.

²⁴⁴ Chalmers, "The Integrated Review," 15.

²⁴⁵ Overn, "Scotland's Potential Independence Defense Implications for Britain, NATO, and the United States," 31–44.

capability and subject to this price instability. American P-8 Poseidon and AH-64 Cobras are also on order and vulnerable to exchange rate hikes.²⁴⁶

A point emphasized in the National Shipbuilding Strategy is the plan to impose hard limits on the service lives of new ship construction. This policy aims to limit the costly life-extension and modernization required to keep older ships in service. Instead of extending their service lives, the ships will be sold to other nations while they remain relatively modern and serviceable. The added benefit of this policy is cashflow to partially offset the ships' initial construction costs. This, in turn, frees up funds to be allocated to new construction.²⁴⁷ While a reasonable recommendation, it seems unlikely that a future government will be effectively constrained by this plan. As mentioned previously, the recommissioning of HMS *Severn* demonstrates waning commitment to this policy.²⁴⁸

3. Political Challenges

The other potential obstacle is the endurance of political will to support this program. The naval building plan is intended to support Britain's renewed overseas ambitions. However, just because the incumbent government published the plan does not mean it is universally favored within Parliament. A change in government could result in a shifting of strategic priorities, which may undermine the RN's plans. There remains a great deal of uncertainty in Britain's future security relationship with Europe as a whole, and new developments on that front could result in changing priorities.²⁴⁹ Other voices in the government have expressed concern that Britain remains too dependent on the United States, a criticism which the *Integrated Review* makes little effort to alleviate.²⁵⁰ Freedman

²⁴⁶ Dorman, "The United Kingdom," 13; Comptroller and Auditor General, "Carrier Strike – Preparing for Deployment," 20.

²⁴⁷ Ministry of Defence, *National Shipbuilding Strategy: The Future of Naval Shipbuilding in the UK*, 24.

²⁴⁸ "Second Life Officially Begins for Severn after Thames Recommissioning."

²⁴⁹ Koziol, "Prospects for EU-UK Security Cooperation"; Chalmers, "The Integrated Review," 10–13.

²⁵⁰ Ben Wallace, Hansard (Commons), 26 April 2021, Vol. 693, cols. 67–72; Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 20, 60.

joins them, suggesting that international engagement should not be assumed necessary in every case.²⁵¹ Unless the fleet can demonstrate the utility of greater presence abroad, a change in domestic political will may severely disrupt the planned future of the RN.

These concerns are especially valid given the legislative strength of the British Parliament. Even with the set and secure budget, there is very little the current government can do that its successor cannot undo. There has been some institutional reform in recent years to assure continuity in national strategic decision-making, mainly the establishment of the National Security Council in 2010.²⁵² Although the continuity provided by a National Security Council is an institutional improvement, Dorman argues that the previous decade has shown that global events can overrule the best laid plans.²⁵³

The UK has always been proud of its Navy, frequently favoring it at the expense of the Army. This trend continues with the Defense Review, which describes the Army as “leaner” with “fewer units required.”²⁵⁴ In practice, this actually means significant manpower and budget cuts for the already lean British Army and Royal Marines. These cuts pose a long-term risk to the Navy’s shipbuilding plans. Any number of future international crises could provoke a reassessment of the Army’s role. If policymakers realize that they cut the land forces too sharply, they may in turn reassess budget priorities. The Navy’s budgetary windfalls may dry up before the 2030 fleet has been completed.

4. Organizational Challenges

Beyond political issues, there are also concerns about organizational capacity and the quality of planning that went into the current procurement plan. Watling offers several criticisms. They argue that a relatively small, cloistered group of government officials generated most of the policy. Poor sequencing between government departments may have

²⁵¹ Lawrence Freedman, “Britain Adrift: The United Kingdom’s Search for a Post- Brexit Role,” *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 3 (June 2020): 14.

²⁵² Dorman, “The United Kingdom,” 10.

²⁵³ Dorman, 11–12.

²⁵⁴ Her Majesty’s Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 53.

created disjointed priorities between MoD and Treasury. Inconsistent priorities would have created inherent contradictions in the plan. For example, the Army's stated goal is a more distributed, expeditionary force, while Russian land forces are still cited as the primary security threat. On the Navy side, lack of specificity on F-35 procurement plans raise concerns about the self-sufficiency of British carrier strike groups.²⁵⁵ These types of oversights raise valid concerns that the entire plan may require significant overhaul before it can be properly executed.

John Parker, a recognized and respected expert on the shipbuilding industry, conducted an independent review of British shipbuilding at the request of the government.²⁵⁶ His results raised several issues which stand to delay or alter the RN's plans. These issues include too many veto players in the government shipbuilding process, delays and cost overruns, and the challenges of multi-year procurement contracts when budgets are not assured from year to year. He also criticized the efficiency of BAE Systems, the only shipbuilder currently constructing RN vessels. Parker's report included a list of thirty-four detailed recommendations.²⁵⁷ Each of these recommendations are addressed and formally accepted by the government in the 2017 National Shipbuilding Strategy.²⁵⁸ However, the extent to which the government succeeds in carrying them out and the net benefit of the recommended changes remains to be seen.

Whether future obstacles are financial, political, or driven by strategic necessity, the plans for the RN in 2030 are on shaky ground. As discussed previously, the RN will lose capability before it completes its modernization.²⁵⁹ If the Government's priorities change before then, the RN risks being saddled with an incomplete, disuniform, and dysfunctional fleet. The necessity to follow through on the National Shipbuilding Strategy

²⁵⁵ Watling, "A Post Mortem of a Disintegrated Review."

²⁵⁶ Parker, "An Independent Report to Inform the UK National Shipbuilding Strategy."

²⁵⁷ Parker, 8–19.

²⁵⁸ Ministry of Defence, *National Shipbuilding Strategy: The Future of Naval Shipbuilding in the UK*, 50–54.

²⁵⁹ Axe, "The Royal Navy Keeps Shrinking—Frigates To Drop By Three Over Five Years."

has been repeatedly acknowledged, but how long these plans can survive the shifting geopolitical landscape is an open question.

D. IMPLICATIONS

1. Implications for Europe and NATO

What does the 2030 plan mean for Britain's commitments in Europe? The Russian Federation is currently the most credible military threat to Europe in general and the UK in particular. Although an active conflict between Russia and the Western Europeans still seems unlikely, deterrence remains a very important element in keeping the European peace. The plans to increase the capabilities of the RN will significantly bolster the European deterrent posture. Traditionally hawkish on Russia, the RN has been an active proponent of NATO Black Sea patrols to counter Russian aggression.²⁶⁰ A scenario in which the European members of NATO can independently, credibly deter Russia would be a significant boon for their American allies.

As mentioned in Chapter III, one of the key investments of the Russian Navy is in anti-ship missile capabilities.²⁶¹ A key distinction in the new RN frigate designs is their enhanced air and missile defense capabilities. Current Russian shipbuilding efforts are bringing new capabilities to the fleet, but only at the same rate as the RN's own modern shipbuilding programs. With the addition of its carriers and modernized ASW platforms, the RN is rapidly becoming an effective regional peer to the Russian Navy. Backstopped by the similarly capable French Navy, the Western Europeans will be able to quite credibly deter Russian aggression at sea. Chalmers argues that more American forces shifting to the Pacific will cause the UK to take up a greater share of the European defense burden.²⁶² Of course, this assumes that the fleet is kept in home waters. If the UK continues in its goal of projecting power further afield, the European deterrence calculus begins to shift again.

²⁶⁰ Schneider, "U.S. and NATO Naval Engagement with Russia in the Black Sea: Historical Patterns and Current Prospects," 24–25.

²⁶¹ Defense Intelligence Agency, *Russia Military Power*, 33, 69–70.

²⁶² Chalmers, "The Integrated Review," 17.

2. Implications for Britain's Alliances Beyond Europe

The plans for an expanded RN are good news to the UK's allies beyond Europe as well. One of the proposed capabilities for the expanded RN is helping to maintain an allied carrier presence in the Persian Gulf. Presently, this Combined Maritime Forces mission has been fulfilled by American carrier strike groups. Britain has expressed an interest in its carriers taking a turn.²⁶³ Such a deployment would certainly provide significant operational experience to the ships as well as galvanize the RN's reputation as a blue-water navy committed to upholding the world order. It would also serve as a significant gesture of burden sharing with the United States, which has been pushing its ships and crews to maintain this continuous presence. Finally, such a move would reinforce the trend towards platform interoperability between the Royal Navy and U.S. Navy (USN), reaffirming to Britain's allies that it can be trusted with high-intensity operations.

However, this deployment would come at the expense of significantly reduced force projection and flag-showing elsewhere. During its slow retreat from the Indo-Pacific in the twentieth century, the RN assessed that four carriers would be preferable and three would be barely adequate to maintain a presence east of Suez. In addition, it was observed that the three-carrier fleet would lack the cost-saving economies of scale that the Americans benefitted from. Britain justified the drawdown at the time, stating that it did not plan to “undertake alone any operations involving intervention against sophisticated opposition” in the Indo-Pacific.²⁶⁴ But does that policy still hold true? With only two carriers available, maintaining a credible presence in the Indo-Pacific will be even more challenging than in the past.

In spite of this relatively small carrier fleet (by historical British standards), the RN is trying to demonstrate credibility and commitment to east of Suez partners. The RN does not yet appear capable of continuous CSG deployments. As new escort and logistics platforms come online, the RN/RAF continue to receive delivery of F-35s, and thus as continuous CSG deployments become possible, the CMF carrier mission will become an

²⁶³ Dorman, “The United Kingdom,” 14.

²⁶⁴ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*, 141.

increasingly viable option. In the meantime, the RN has permanently deployed two OPVs to the Indo-Pacific (although they lack any home port facility, instead relying on regional allies) with plans for a littoral response group deployment to follow.²⁶⁵

The tradeoffs between deterring Russia at home, supporting the CMF mission in the Gulf, and showing the flag in the Indo-Pacific demonstrates a point learned in the early twentieth century: the capability to be present is not the same as actual presence. A fleet can go anywhere, but it can only be in one place at a time. The planned expansion of the RN will make it a credible force in Europe or a decent tool for projecting power globally, but it will remain unable to fill both roles simultaneously. Once the fleet is recalled, it is very difficult to regain the global position it abandoned.²⁶⁶ In many ways, the RN is still working to rebuild its influence in the Indo-Pacific, which it gradually relinquished due to challenges closer to home. This history demonstrates that the RN's effort and expense devoted to "tilting" to the Indo-Pacific may not endure. If the fleet is forced home to defend against persistent rising tension with Russia, this overseas influence will rapidly evaporate. Allies can certainly help, but there are political considerations that prevent them from covering the European flank alone. For example, it may be difficult to justify to the British electorate why allied ships are defending Britain while Her Majesty's carriers are anchored in Singapore.

Beyond a full-scale conflict, British planners are attuned to the possibility of small-scale military interventions, such as Syria (2014) and Libya (2011). The UK has a long history of involving itself in limited air and sea operations (see Figure 2, Countries Subject to Royal Navy Operations 1946–2010). Till and Robson have gone on to argue that these operations represent the quintessential, Corbettian, British way of war.²⁶⁷ To successfully conduct these operations, the RN must bring adequate naval airpower. As mentioned in

²⁶⁵ "United Kingdom - Navy," 9; "Patrol Ships Bid Farewell to Portsmouth as They Begin Indo-Pacific Deployment"; Tim Kelley and Irene Wang, "Britain to Permanently Deploy Two Warships in Asian Waters," *Reuters*, July 20, 2021, sec. United Kingdom, <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-permanently-deploy-two-warships-asian-waters-2021-07-20/>.

²⁶⁶ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, chaps. 8–9.

²⁶⁷ Till and Robson, "UK Air-Sea Integration in Libya, 2011: A Successful Blueprint For the Future?" "Key Points."

Chapter III, NATO planners' goal was 300 sorties a day during the 2011 intervention in Libya, yet they achieved only half that number with the combination of USN, RN, and French carriers.²⁶⁸ The newer *Queen Elizabeth* class boasts a potential for 110 sorties per day, but this rather extreme scenario is unsustainable for prolonged operations and assumes a non-standard air wing is embarked.²⁶⁹ As in all things, the nature of the air/anti-air threat posed by a potential opponent is a significant variable. Nonetheless, the RN should not expect to carry out a significant air campaign by its carrier aviation alone.

3. Implications for Britain's Overseas Territories

The Falklands/Malvinas War is unlikely to repeat itself, but it still generated important strategic lessons. Key among these is that Britain may be called upon to project power anywhere it still holds territory. The OPVs are useful for fisheries enforcement and showing the flag but are not major combatants. As long as Britain desires to keep its far-flung possessions, it should remain prepared to dispatch the fleet in response to crisis. By this metric, the planned RN is extremely capable as a combat force. Once again sealift, both for fleet logistics and ground force mobility, appears to be the biggest potential stumbling block.

E. CONCLUSION

As conceived, the Royal Navy of 2030 will be a capable, highly modern force with credible independent force projection ability. It should, at the very least, be able to sustain one continuous CSG deployment and meet its stated obligations. The core challenge remains the low quantity of hulls that will be available. In addition, there are numerous political, economic, or organizational risks which could undermine the long-term plan. The final chapter of this work will discuss key findings from this research and present policy recommendations.

²⁶⁸ Till and Robson, 12.

²⁶⁹ Faircount Media Group, "HMS Queen Elizabeth: Commemorating First Entry into Her Home Port," 2017, https://issuu.com/faircountmedia/docs/hms_queen_elizabeth.

V. CONCLUSION

The elements of sea power are by no means limited to combat craft, weapons, and trained personnel but include the shore establishment, well-sited bases, commercial shipping, and advantageous international alignments.

—E. B. Potter, 1960²⁷⁰

The Royal Navy is not the only thing changing in the United Kingdom, which is still working to define its place in the world post-Brexit. Its “Global Britain” plan contains sweeping initiatives across the range of government policies.²⁷¹ The changes to the RN are part of this larger policy of increasing engagement on the global stage. This also comes at a time when the United States remains focused on the Pacific and is attempting to restore its relationships with European allies. Competition with Russia has increased dramatically. This is the world the RN is working to meet.

This project has attempted to answer whether the British Royal Navy’s current and planned capabilities match its strategic goals. The three main findings can be summarized as follows: (1) the RN can meet its current and future commitments if the stated force structure plans are followed; (2) there is significant strategic risk associated with failure to follow through on these plans; and finally (3) close cooperation with Britain’s allies (both in NATO and globally) will continue to be an important supporting element of RN policy. This concluding chapter will discuss each of these major findings in greater detail before providing recommendations and concluding remarks. Whereas previous chapters have benefited from structuring the analysis in terms of Europe, allies beyond Europe, and Britain’s Overseas Territories, this chapter will return to a broader view regarding the UK’s position in the world as a whole.

²⁷⁰ As quoted by Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, 4.

²⁷¹ Her Majesty’s Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 14–17.

A. FINDINGS

1. The Royal Navy Can Plausibly Meet Its Present and Future Commitments

The 2021 *Integrated Review* outlined an ambitious plan for the United Kingdom to reaffirm its role as not just a regional but a global power. Most significant (from the RN's perspective) is the "tilt" to the Indo-Pacific.²⁷² The RN has always been able to project power to this region, but recent decades have diminished its ability to do so consistently. This planned increase in global influence is layered atop Britain's standing commitments to home, NATO, and territorial defense. The planned increases in capabilities must be met with sustained fleet availability in order to make this happen.

The new aircraft carriers, paired with the ability to field F-35s, represent a significant increase in RN force projection capabilities. Hull-for-hull and airframe-for-airframe, the RN possesses state-of-the-art capabilities. The RN can thus project a very credible modern naval force. The current challenge is sustaining this projection consistently. As Till suggests, significant naval "presence" operations require both sustained and credible forces.²⁷³ At the moment, the RN may struggle to meet both of those requirements.

The RN's role in European defense appears to be secure, even in an imperfect 2030 scenario. It maintains one of the most significant navies on the continent. The largest risk present is that the new frigates may not be delivered in sufficient speed or quantity to bolster RN anti-submarine and air defense capabilities. This risk is magnified if the escort fleet stagnates and the RN chooses to continue pushing forces to the Indo-Pacific, leaving its European naval capacity even lighter than before.

²⁷² Her Majesty's Government, 66.

²⁷³ Till, *Seapower*, chap. 10.

Beyond Europe, the RN is in a moderately stable position. It is highly modern in its core capabilities and enjoys ever-increasing levels of interoperability with its allies.²⁷⁴ Depending on how comfortable it is relying on allies and partners to fulfill key roles (escorts, logistics vessels) within its force structure, the RN may leverage this interoperability to significantly increase the availability and reach of its forces. Of course, the RN's own sophisticated capabilities reciprocate this alliance utility in equal or greater measure. The RN stands to gain significantly by continued cooperation with its global network or allies and partners, but in the near term may be more dependent on them than it would prefer.

“East of Suez” is a famous historical benchmark in British defense policy.²⁷⁵ On this front, the RN is still working to reassert itself. It has successfully engaged in both large-scale intermittent (*Queen Elizabeth* CSG) and smaller permanent (HMS *Montrose* in the Arabian Gulf, and recently HMS *Spey* and *Tamar* in the Indo-Pacific) deployments.²⁷⁶ The challenge remains in that the larger strike group deployments globally will significantly limit the forces available closer to home.²⁷⁷ Britain recently assumed command of the NATO Maritime High Readiness Force, something it would not likely have been capable of if its active carrier (and air wing) was still in the Indo-Pacific.²⁷⁸ It is worth remembering that the RN withdrew from its east of Suez presence in the 1960s despite having a numerically greater force than it does today.²⁷⁹ At the same time, there has been a proliferation of increasingly competitive navies in the region, making the

²⁷⁴ Eckstein, “U.S., U.K. Navies Working to Achieve ‘Interchangeability’ in Carrier Forces, Collaboration on Unmanned and AI”; “Royal Navy Launches Missile from Autonomous Vessel in NATO Exercise.”

²⁷⁵ Originally attributed to Rudyard Kipling in 1890. James, “Global Britain’s Strategic Problem East of Suez,” 171.

²⁷⁶ “UK Warship Passes 1,000-Day Milestone Keeping Middle East Sea Lanes Open”; House of Commons Defence Committee, *We’re Going to Need a Bigger Navy*, 15.

²⁷⁷ “UK Warship Passes 1,000-Day Milestone Keeping Middle East Sea Lanes Open; “House of Commons Defence Committee, *We’re Going to Need a Bigger Navy*, 15.

²⁷⁸ “‘Pride, Passion and Purpose’ as Royal Navy Takes on Key NATO Mission.”

²⁷⁹ See Table 2 and Figure 1.

generation of a credible British presence even more difficult going forward.²⁸⁰ Although the RN can project its forces globally, it must be mindful of these tradeoffs.

In spite of this challenge, the east of Suez presence operations are trending ever upwards. The Offshore Patrol Vessels deployed in the Indo-Pacific are earmarked to be replaced by more capable and credible Type 31e frigates in coming years, while the RN looks to expand its successful rotational crew model to more vessels.²⁸¹ The increased CSG deployment capability projected to come online with the full availability of two carriers and associated air wings will make large-scale east of Suez deployments at least routine, even if not continuous.

2. The Royal Navy Will Face Significant Strategic Risks over the Next Decade

As repeated throughout previous chapters, there are risks on the path the RN has chosen. Some of the most salient ones bear repeating. The purpose of this analysis is neither to predict the future nor disparage the condition of the RN. To that end, no definitive claims are made about the likelihood of any of these outcomes, only that they remain possibilities to be aware of or potentially mitigate against. The following possibilities are not exhaustive, nor are they presented in any particular order.

Although the RN can proudly anticipate several capability improvements, it will continue to be challenged by the sheer quantity of hulls available under current plans. There are only six primary air defense escorts (the Type 45 destroyers) with only the faintest hint of replacement or reinforcement on the horizon.²⁸² The fleet will see frigate numbers drop before it regains its current levels in the late 2020s, limiting flexibility and availability for CSG deployments.²⁸³ Finally, the current shortfall in dry cargo logistics vessels (and at a

²⁸⁰ Chalmers, “The Integrated Review,” 4.

²⁸¹ House of Commons Defence Committee, *We’re Going to Need a Bigger Navy*, 19; “UK Warship Passes 1,000-Day Milestone Keeping Middle East Sea Lanes Open.”

²⁸² “Pennant List – United Kingdom.”; Her Majesty’s Government and Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 50.

²⁸³ Axe, “The Royal Navy Keeps Shrinking—Frigates To Drop By Three Over Five Years.”

time when the few remaining are being sold off) limits the fleet's reach.²⁸⁴ Allies can certainly help make up for this limitation, and will undoubtedly continue to do so, but the RN should remain mindful of the risk it faces if it (by want or necessity) ever chooses to act alone. As it stands, the RN is not in a position to sustain any ship casualties (which can occur in peacetime as well as war) and still maintain its operational commitments or force structure.

Another potential obstacle is an incomplete shipbuilding plan. With ships already being decommissioned in anticipation of new hulls, an interruption or reduction in planned building risks leaving the RN in a weaker position than it is today.²⁸⁵ Such a pitfall would presumably come from a contraction in the Navy's budget, either due to shrinking military spending in general or a reprioritization of the defense budget between various services. Economic contraction, change of government, or shift in strategic priorities towards Russia may trigger such changes. The latter option has potential if the recent cuts to land forces are found to have been too extreme.²⁸⁶ Whatever the reason, an incomplete transition to its planned force structure could leave the RN with fewer ships and less capability than it has today.

Third, the Scottish independence movement remains a potential threat to the RN's budgets and bases. Aside from the larger government restructuring this would cause, it could potentially cost the RN its Scottish SSBN bases.²⁸⁷ Overn has analyzed the costs associated with potentially rebasing the SSBN fleet and found estimates in the range of several billion pounds for such a move.²⁸⁸ Such a change would force significant austerity on other elements of the RN budget for years to come. Alternatives have been suggested,

²⁸⁴ Alan Tovey, "Egypt Buys Two Mothballed Royal Navy Supply Ships," *The Telegraph*, October 30, 2021, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2021/10/30/egypt-buys-two-mothballed-royal-navy-supply-ships/>.

²⁸⁵ Hansard (Commons), 8 February 2017, Vol. 621, col. 160.

²⁸⁶ Chalmers, "The Integrated Review," 19–20.

²⁸⁷ Overn, "Scotland's Potential Independence Defense Implications for Britain, NATO, and the United States," 31–32.

²⁸⁸ Overn, 34.

such as the establishment of a “Nuclear Gibraltar,” with the UK either retaining sovereignty over the base at Faslane or gaining a base in a different allied nation, but the technical and diplomatic feasibility of this option is a matter for separate research.²⁸⁹ Of course, a successful Scottish independence movement would also force the UK to reevaluate its global commitments and priorities more broadly, likely overriding any current plans for the RN.

Lastly, the risk of cost overruns in the *Dreadnought* SSBN development and nuclear warhead modernization program has the potential to sap RN budgetary resources. Although there is a £10 billion contingency fund in place, public opinion concerning cost overruns may further politicize the RN budget.²⁹⁰ Although necessary, overhauling the strategic nuclear deterrent at the same time as a conventional naval force transition creates a delicate budgetary situation.

We can consider the strategic risk facing the RN to be the gap between its capabilities and its goals. By this metric, it has chosen to expand its commitments before its abilities, and the coming years will see this gap widen before it closes. With a net decrease in quantity of escorts over the short term, every mission area could potentially suffer.²⁹¹ There is risk that CSG deployments will be delayed or grow increasingly dependent on allied forces to participate, and other routine commitments may be reduced to triage force availability. For Britain’s allies and commitments beyond Europe, an incomplete transition likely means less presence or burden sharing in these theaters. The RN would then struggle to balance its heightened Indo-Pacific aspirations against its ongoing commitments in Europe and would likely see only one fully maintained.

²⁸⁹ Andy Gregory, “‘No Plans’ to Move Nuclear Subs Abroad in Event of Scottish Independence, MoD Insists,” *The Independent*, September 1, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/no-plans-to-move-nuclear-subs-abroad-in-event-of-scottish-independence-mod-insists-b1912807.html>; Overn, “Scotland’s Potential Independence Defense Implications for Britain, NATO, and the United States,” 32–38.

²⁹⁰ Ministry of Defence, “Dreadnought Submarine Programme: Factsheet.”

²⁹¹ Axe, “The Royal Navy Keeps Shrinking—Frigates To Drop By Three Over Five Years.”

3. Allies Remain Essential to Achieving Britain’s Published Objectives

Close relationships with Britain’s allies remain to the RN’s material and political benefit. The government has already sunk significant costs in ensuring hardware interoperability with its major allies, and now is the time to benefit from that spending.²⁹² Additionally, every allied carrier, escort, or aircraft the RN sails with is one fewer it needs to project and maintain in the short term.

Politically, continued close cooperation will entrench the new “Global Britain” role that the government is trying to establish.²⁹³ Reaffirming political and military ties makes British naval presence both more credible and more welcome in the regions where it intends to operate. Following from that, these diplomatic benefits produce a soft power return on investment for decision makers back in London, helping to demonstrate the utility of increased naval spending. Unless the RN can generate these diplomatic and political benefits for its leaders, any inroads it develops risk being withdrawn by a change in political direction.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

The RN should actively pursue funding to continue building the new Type 26 and 31e frigates after the currently contracted batches are complete. While this ultimately is a matter for the British taxpayers to settle, the current naval strategy will greatly benefit from a larger escort fleet. Increased availability allows for more flexibility with independent and continuous CSG deployments, while also creating opportunities for the smaller ships to join allied exercises and serve as vehicles for naval diplomacy. Additionally, the maintenance and upkeep of individual ships can only stand to benefit from a decreased operational tempo, potentially generating savings over the life cycle of the fleet.

If the RN wants to sustain its increased mandate to operate east of Suez, it must ensure that it is generating significant strategic value by its presence. That value could take

²⁹² For example, its decision to adopt the F-35, Chuter, “Two Reasons Britain Could Slow Its Purchase of the F-35.”

²⁹³ Her Majesty’s Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 14.

the form of increased economic ties, security cooperation, or diplomatic prestige and influence. As James suggests, the last withdrawal from the region occurred when the costs began to outweigh the strategic benefit.²⁹⁴ If policymakers believe that the best interests of the British people include an increased presence in the Indo-Pacific, then it must demonstrate meaningful results from these efforts. Only then will the investments and gains in that region be insulated from the next budgetary or foreign policy crisis back home.

In addition to encouraging follow-through on the vision presented in the *Integrated Review*, the best line of effort for the RN to pursue is further integration with its allies. Increased interoperation between British and allied navies, both in Europe and beyond, will allow the RN to maintain a footprint everywhere it wants to, while still economizing on forces required for its standing commitments. Allies who support the RN's ambitious transition will find their future British colleagues are significantly more capable and wield greater international prestige as a result of this renewed global engagement.

C. CONCLUSION

It bears mentioning that the level of scrutiny presented here would expose the potential weaknesses of any navy, and the RN is no exception. The goal is not to criticize the Royal Navy, but rather to provide greater insight into the unique abilities and challenges faced by this key NATO ally. Greater awareness and understanding can promote enhanced collaboration and allow more effective cooperation at not only the operational but also the strategic level.

For the United States, the RN's future plans carry many important lessons. American planners should anticipate a more active RN with an increased mandate to operate globally. This is paired with new and increased capabilities that the RN is keen to demonstrate, which in turn provides an opportunity for the U.S. to develop new multilateral engagements and further incorporate the RN into its strategic plans. For example, British-led combined task forces could alleviate USN force requirements and allow the RN to demonstrate its renewed global commitment. Increased RN presence worldwide provides

²⁹⁴ James, "Global Britain's Strategic Problem East of Suez," 173.

a useful force multiplier for American operational planners and entrenches the strategic rationale for further RN investment.

However, the U.S. should be aware that this is also a dangerous time for the RN. The success of its goals over the next decade is not guaranteed, and the cost of failure is potentially a reduction below its current capabilities. The U.S. stands to gain from a strengthened RN, and to that end should continue working to support RN initiatives, deployments, and publicity to galvanize both domestic and international support for its increased global presence. Now is the time for American policymakers to actively support opportunities for the RN to engage with America's partners worldwide. These opportunities will demonstrate both the utility and the capability of the modern RN and help to entrench the renewed global ambitions of the United States' closest ally.

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