



# ROYAL NAVY GALAXY

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## A HARD WORKING AND STRONGER NAVY

Reading the news over the past few days you'd be forgiven for thinking that the Royal Navy had packed up and gone home, leaving Britain undefended.

The reality is altogether different, and should be judged by action not by commentary. As First Sea Lord, I owe it to our sailors and marines, many of whom are preparing to spend Christmas away from their loved ones, to ensure the country recognises how hard they are working for our island nation.

Today, the Royal Navy has 30 ships and submarines, and over 8000 of our young men and women - regular, reserve and civilian - committed to operations at home and around the world. The Royal Navy continues to fulfil our standing commitments, from supporting British overseas territories in the Caribbean and the Falklands to the Royal Marines' ongoing support to counter-terrorism at home. A ballistic missile submarine is currently on patrol deterring state based threats against the UK and our NATO allies, as has been the case 24 hours a day, every day, for the last 47 years.

In Northern Europe and the Baltic, we are responding to the highest level of Russian naval activity since the end of the Cold War. In the Mediterranean and the Aegean, we continue to work alongside our European partners to counter arms-traffickers and people smugglers, and to stem the flow of migrants. Meanwhile in the Gulf we are working to protect international shipping in a region which is essential to the UK's economic security.

Sadly the world is less certain and less safe. But our sense of responsibility has not changed. The Royal Navy may be smaller than in the past but has a strong future so this is no time to talk the Navy down.

The Royal Navy does have challenges, in people, budgets and equipment, but these must be put in perspective. The Royal Navy's challenges are those of a first-rate Navy. You don't hear about the same issues in many other navies – and believe me, they exist - because they don't operate with the same sophistication or expectation. The Type 45 destroyer is a case in point. It is a hugely innovative ship, and the propulsion systems have turned out to be less reliable than originally envisaged. Money is now in place to put this right, but what is beyond doubt is that these ships offer one of the best anti-aircraft capabilities in the world. If they weren't up to the job then the US and French navies would not entrust them with protection of their aircraft carriers in the Gulf.

Protecting our Nation's interests

The UK, like any developed economy, has to control public spending. Difficult decisions had to be taken to balance the books and retiring the Harpoon missile system was one. That weapon was reaching the end of its life, which is why we are exploring the advanced technologies that will take its place. Last month the Royal Navy held the largest international gathering of autonomous systems ever staged, and we will shortly trial both an energy weapon and artificial intelligence at sea. These are the technologies that will maintain our superiority over more conventional navies.

We must also ensure that the focus on our current challenges does not obscure the scale of investment which is currently taking place or its significance for the UK's place in the world. With last month's cutting of steel for the future HMS Dreadnought, the renewal of the nuclear deterrent has begun, but it's the impending arrival of the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers, and their air group of fifth generation fighters, that really mark the beginning of a new era.

If you need a further reminder of the practical and symbolic power coming our way, consider the international significance attached to the recent deployment of the Russian carrier Kuznetsov and her battle group to the Mediterranean. When the French carrier Charles De Gaulle enters refit at the beginning of next year, Western Europe will be left without a large aircraft carrier for operations, which again highlights the strategic value that two carriers flying the White Ensign will bring to our nation, and our partnerships, in the decades ahead.

Backed by a commitment to meeting-NATO's requirement to spend 2% of GDP on Defence, last year's Defence Review mandated the necessary supporting components in place to ensure a balanced Fleet, including new F35B Joint Strike Fighters, Type 26 frigates, Maritime Patrol Aircraft and Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships. Crucially, the Government has repeatedly stated its ambition to grow the size of the Royal Navy by the 2030s through the construction of a new class of General Purpose frigate. This will be a complex warship, able to protect and defend and to exert influence around the world, but deliberately shaped with lessons from industry to make it more exportable to our international partners. I look forward to the imminent publication of the National Shipbuilding Strategy.

This is hugely significant. For most of my 38 year career, the story of the Royal Navy has been one of gradual, managed contraction. Now, at long last, we have an opportunity to reverse this trend, rebuilding in particular resilience in our destroyer and frigate numbers, the backbone of a fighting Navy. This would also permit a more frequent presence in parts of the world in which we have been spread thin in recent years in order to support the UK's growing global economic ambitions.

So, rest assured, I intend to work with the Government in the coming months and years to deliver their ambition for a larger Navy. Only this will ensure the Royal Navy can continue to deter our enemies, protect our people and promote our prosperity in these uncertain times.

**1SL**