

# Safeguarding commerce at sea



Ensuring that the maritime trading community can carry out its business free from interruption and attack requires international partnerships and a strategic vision. The UK's Maritime Security Operations (MSO) encapsulates the vision and the Royal Navy provides the required assets and capability

## The British Government's strategy for the protection of maritime trade

is based on two pillars; political consensus and operational/technical capability. While the UK Government departments, in particular the Department for Transport; the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform; the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; and the Ministry of Defence, work with the international community at Government level, the Royal Navy maintains a constant presence from the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Gulf, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic to ensure

that the vital sea lanes and choke points along the way are safe to navigate. Such a huge task can only be achieved, however, by collaborating with other navies and coastguards through a series of combined operations and strategic alliances.

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peacetime, four global security trends form the basis for MSO activity; terrorism, piracy, drug- and people-trafficking, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. As the lines between these threats become increasingly blurred, the response needs to be ever more sophisticated, robust, intelligence-led and partnership driven.

The roadmap to achieve success is multifaceted and complex, but in essence draws on greater collaboration with NATO and the EU as well as bringing onboard a wider array of partner nations from beyond those two organisations through institutions such as the Mediterranean Dialogue process and the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) in the Far East.

More specifically, the Royal Navy is actively responding to the EU Green Paper 'Towards a future Maritime Policy for the Union: A European Vision for the Oceans and Seas', presented by the EU Commissioner for Maritime Affairs on 7 June 2006, in order to support the need for an inter-agency and multinational approach in

Maritime Security. Similarly, the Royal Navy accepts that the multi-national maritime coalition concept, as originally proposed by the US Admiral Mike Mullen, is another step along the way to a more joined up system of security management at sea, calling as it does for a voluntary network that unites maritime forces, port operators, commercial shipping and international governmental and non-governmental agencies.

In order for these organisations to be able to co-ordinate their work more effectively, a common operational picture of commercial ('white') shipping needs to be developed, which can be used as a means of receiving existing AIS (Automatic Identification System) data and fusing it with a number of additional data feeds on a secure but unclassified platform.

The Royal Navy is helping to develop this white shipping picture through the TELESTO web-based software tool. As well as a 'common picture' the various maritime forces need to share common working practices and capabilities with each other and with the commercial shipping sector. Training is key to this, and the Royal Navy dedicates a considerable effort to the support of international maritime forces, offering courses both on shore and while on deployment at sea. A recent example of this was the successful introduction of a ship-boarding capability to the Republic of Yemen's Coast Guard.

## The Royal Navy's commitment to maritime trade Indian Ocean:

Co-operation with Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore through the FPDA has shifted from a purely defence-centric collaboration to one that has recognised the importance of a joint effort to combat terrorism and piracy in the region.

A Royal Navy Task Group regularly participates in FPDA combined exercises in the region, which covers the strategically important Strait of Malacca, one of the world's busiest and most difficult trading routes. In late 2004, the nature of these exercises changed radically when 'new-look' exercises began with a specific objective to include a broader maritime security remit covering anti-piracy, counter-terrorism, drugs trafficking and people smuggling. The enhanced collaboration between the regional powers in this area has resulted in a dramatic reduction of piracy incidents. ▶



## Arabian Gulf and Horn of Africa:

As the UK has been transitioning from being a net exporter to a net importer of oil since 2005, it is ever more important that our oil and gas needs can be guaranteed without any breaks in supply. Since the vast majority of UK oil imports come from the Middle-East it is absolutely vital that the terrorist threat to the oil installations in the region is countered. Accordingly, the Royal Navy has stepped up its efforts to combat them and is a leading member of the Combined Task Forces (CTF) 150, 152 and 158, which have been directed to maintain maritime security and safeguard the shipping and oil installations in the area.

The Task Forces are made up of an international coalition of navies from the US, Europe and Asia. Collectively, they undertake MSO operations in the waters stretching from the oil terminals off the port of Basra through the Arabian Gulf into the Indian Ocean, around the Gulf of Aden and up the Red Sea to the Suez Canal. A by-product of this presence has been a reduction in other illegal activity in these waters, adding to a more general reduction in piracy strikes globally over the past three years.

## Mediterranean Sea:

The Royal Navy maintains a permanent presence in the Mediterranean Sea as part of NATO's Operation Active Endeavour, which began in October 2001, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US. Over the years the operation's scope and tasks have increased. Interdiction operations started in October 2001 followed by a brief period during which civilian vessels were escorted through the Strait of Gibraltar. Ship boarding operations started in April 2003 and by March 2004 Operation Active Endeavour's remit was expanded to take in the whole of the Mediterranean Sea. Piracy is rare in the Mediterranean, but it is, however, a hotspot for smugglers and people traffickers and a key route for the transportation of illegal arms shipments to the numerous terrorist factions and insurgents operating within an arm's length of the Mediterranean shoreline.

In a further high-profile example of the Royal Navy's support to the business community, British ships involved in Active Endeavour, together with others on deployment in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean, were quickly assembled, in July 2006, to take part in the rescue of the British community trapped in war-torn Beirut as part of Operation Highbrow. More than 4,000 'entitled' people, who were in the Lebanon on business or just visiting the country, were transported to Cyprus before being airlifted back to the UK in what was one of the largest seaborne evacuations since the Allied troops were rescued from the Dunkirk beaches during the Second World War.

## Atlantic Ocean:

Commerce thrives best in conditions of stability. Anything that endangers that can have significant knock-on effects to the business world and to national economies. Humanitarian relief operations are therefore a vital part of helping to maintain order and, not surprisingly, the Royal Navy plays a crucial role in the UK's ability to engage in these types of missions.

The Royal Navy's effort to monitor hurricanes, consisting of a warship and a Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) support vessel, is an example of how the Royal Navy's humanitarian relief function is undertaken on an annual basis, with ships stationed out in the Caribbean as part of the Atlantic Patrol Task (North).



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In 2004 HMS *Richmond* and RFA *Wave Ruler* helped Grenada and the Cayman Islands recover from the destructive effects of Hurricane Ivan by putting men ashore on both islands to deliver emergency supplies, as well as to reconnect the water and electricity, re-establish air transport links and make sure that medical provision was possible, enabling the civil administrations to retain control of the situation.

The ships stationed in the Caribbean also support the US Navy and Coastguard anti-narcotics operations in and around the Gulf of Mexico. In the 15 months leading up to a significant drugs interdiction in May 2007, where cocaine worth £28 million was confiscated by HMS *Ocean*, the Royal Navy had seized more than £1 billion worth of illegal narcotics.

Atlantic Task Patrol (South), operating further below in the South Atlantic, consists of a warship, patrol ship and support vessel. It maintains the security of UK dependencies in the South Atlantic and patrols the coast of West Africa in search of pirates who have been monitored operating off the Coast of Nigeria. In addition to these three ships, HMS *Endurance* is on tour for half the year on ice patrol and hydrographic survey duties, both of which are a fundamental support to shipping south of Cape Horn and towards Antarctica.

## UK territorial waters:

As well as contributing to the protection of the UK's oil and gas fields in the North Sea, the Royal Navy also assists with the safeguarding of UK maritime ports and the integrity of UK fishing waters, from which an annual catch valued at £500 million is extracted.

Perhaps more importantly, the Royal Navy, together with the RAF and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, are on call to save lives at sea. In 2006 more than 1,000 lives were saved in waters around the British Isles, many of them sailors from ships registered to the UK fleet as well as ships bearing flags of other nations. Furthermore, to ensure that the sea lanes are safe to cross without obstruction, the Royal Navy conducts hydrographic surveys looking for changes to the seabed and the presence of dangerous objects. Its expertise is such that Royal Navy charts are sold world-wide via the UK Hydrographic Office and contribute not just to safe navigation, but also to the UK exchequer by as much as £50 million a year. ■