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CARRIER ENABLED FOREIGN POLICY

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JCSP 41

Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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SOLO FLIGHT - CARRIER ENABLED FOREIGN POLICY

the....greatest value [of the Navy] will be found in events that fail to occur because of its influence..

Professor Colin Gray

INTRODUCTION

On 14 February 1966, the British government cancelled the first of a new generation of large aircraft carriers; the 55,000 tonne ship to be named *Queen Elizabeth* was designed to maintain Britain's East of Suez presence.¹ This seminal moment 'was the most traumatic shock to the Royal Navy (RN) of the entire post war period' and redefined the shape of the Navy for the next half century.² Exactly 50 years later and the large aircraft carrier will rejoin the fleet, *HMS Queen Elizabeth*, will be handed over to the RN in 2017, the first of two 65,000 tonne ships, representing the largest RN vessels ever built, these will deliver Carrier Enabled Power Projection (CEPP) in support of the British national interest.³

Aircraft carrier capability declined steadily throughout the last 50 years culminating in Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) 2010, which ended fixed wing carrier aviation with the sudden withdrawal of the Sea Harrier from service.⁴ This reduction in capability was matched by a steadily shrinking global presence, which started with a commitment to withdraw from East of Suez in 1967.⁵ In 2010 the new Prime Minister (PM) David Cameron, in reference to British economic and military assets, boasted: "Few countries on earth have this powerful combination of assets, and

¹ Britain will be used throughout to denote The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

² Grove, Eric J, *Vanguard to Trident: British Naval Policy since World War II* (London: The Bodley Head, 1987), 280.

³ 'Carrier Enabled Power Projection' (CEPP); a hybridised power projection capability, combining Carrier Strike and littoral manoeuvre. This will include operating a mixed air group from the operational aircraft carrier including concurrently up to twelve Merlin, a small number of Chinook and up to eight Apache helicopters alongside twelve F-35s.

⁴ UK Government, "The Strategic Defence and Security Review: Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty." October 1, 2010. Accessed November 27, 2014. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-strategic-defence-and-security-review-securing-britain-in-an-age-of-uncertainty>.

⁵ Stocker, J, "Full Circle: Queen Elizabeth to Invincible and back again," in *Dreadnought to Daring*, ed. Peter Hore (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2012), 147.

even fewer have the ability to make best use of them.”⁶ This sentiment was reaffirmed in the 2010 National Security Strategy, which defined Britain’s national responsibility as: ‘...applying all our instruments of power and influence to shape the global environment and tackle potential risks at source.’⁷

However, since taking this position there has been little action to support it, General Sir Richard Shirreff recently accused the PM of becoming a “Foreign policy irrelevance” following the failure of the UK to act in the Ukraine crisis.⁸ The 2011 air strikes in Libya was the final act in a series of ill-fated ethically motivated foreign policies started by PM Tony Blair, the defence budget has since slipped from 4th to 6th largest, and British application of diplomatic and military power has been notably absent on the world stage.⁹ There has been a deliberate and overt policy of relying on economic influence over diplomatic and military, this mercantilist approach arose from the requirements of economic regeneration following the 2008 financial crisis.

Despite the Conservatives winning an overall majority in the 7 May 2015 elections, it is unlikely that the pressure on the defence budget will be relieved, due to the continued commitment to fiscal austerity. Britain will fall short of its own promise to spend 2% GDP on defence, marking a strategically significant watershed, which could harm relations with America who used to regard Britain as: “the standard bearer for allied behaviour.”¹⁰

In the context of a shrinking defence budget, this paper will argue the case for continued investment in the *Queen Elizabeth* class aircraft carriers, to enable a foreign policy in support of Britain’s global interests. The new carriers uniquely provide a range

⁶ David, Cameron. "Speech to Lord Mayor's Banquet." UK Government Speeches. November 15, 2010. Accessed May 12, 2015. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/speech-to-lord-mayors-banquet>.

⁷ UK Government, "A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy." October 1, 2010. Accessed November 27, 2014. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61936/national-security-strategy.pdf

⁸ Riley-Smith, Ben. "David Cameron a 'foreign Policy Irrelevance' over Russia, Says Britain's Former Top Commander in Nato." The Telegraph. February 6, 2015. Accessed April 11, 2015. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/liberaldemocrats/11394788/David-Cameron-a-foreign-policy-irrelevance-over-Russia-says-Britains-former-top-commander-in-Nato.html>.

⁹ “Little Britain.” *The Economist*, April 4, 2015.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

of smart power options to empower government, delivering everything from conventional deterrence to humanitarian relief. If leveraged correctly they will stop the perceived decline of British influence by enforcing government intentions, simply by their presence.

By examining historical overseas interventions, both with, and without the use of carrier power, I will demonstrate how the capability directly correlates with the perception of British power and influence. The historical analysis will first examine the utility of Carriers in exerting maritime leverage through deterrence, using the example of the Belize incident of 1972, then the failure of conventional deterrence in the Falkland Islands Conflict of 1982. Operation Palliser (2000) in Sierra Leone will demonstrate the flexibility and responsiveness of a carrier in stabilising a former colony. Finally, the lack of a fixed wing carrier capability in Operation Ellamy, Libya 2011, will serve as an example of the consequences of this gap.

Carrier capability is effectively a policy enabler; the apparent lack of foreign policy is accentuated by the paucity of hard power options from a shrinking defence budget. The strategic utility of Aircraft Carriers will be demonstrated using examples from the historical case studies. This will show how the *Queen Elizabeth* class should make a significant contribution to preventing further decline of British influence, through utilising the concept of Carrier Enabled Power Projection.

WHY BRITAIN NEEDS GLOBAL INFLUENCE

It is in Britain's national interest to reject any notion of the shrinkage of our influence.

- National Security Strategy, 2010

Following the economic crash of 2008, the Conservative-Liberal coalition came to power in 2010, they quickly abandoned the 'offensive liberal' interventionist strategy of previous Labour governments, focusing instead on the economy as the source of

Britain's strength and security.¹¹ It is Britain's global economic connections, which are the power house of the economy. Almost 80% of GDP comes from service industries; one of the most important financial markets in the world.¹² As the 4th largest exporter, Britain's maritime connections span the globe creating a 56 Billion pound maritime sector.¹³

Ensuring that Britain has the power to influence events globally, to favour its economic situation, is the central tenant of the National Security Strategy, this states: 'an economic deficit is also a security deficit.'¹⁴ Being able to influence other countries in favour of trade with Britain in an increasingly competitive global market is central to its security and prosperity.

There is much debate about whether or not this strategy is working. There is a lack of engagement in Europe and commitment to an in/out EU referendum in 2017, add to this a falling defence budget, and Britain's relationship with the US may deteriorate, leaving it with little influence in America or Europe.¹⁵ However, whilst Britain may be on this trajectory it has not happened yet, this makes it imperative to prevent any further decline of its significant structural power capital. Due to its empire legacy and strong diplomatic service, Britain's connections and outlook are far more global than any other European country. It is still one of the few European countries with a global expeditionary capability, nuclear deterrent, and a permanent seat on the Security Council. Whilst Britain's policies may have diversified away from a European focus, it will remain a great power.¹⁶

¹¹ Gilmore, Jonathan. "The Uncertain Merger of Values and Interests in UK Foreign Policy." *International Affairs* 90, no. 3 (2014): 544.

¹² Morris, Justin. "How Great is Britain? Power, Responsibility and Britain's Future Global Role." *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 13, no. 3 (2011), 332.

¹³ Ministry of Defence, "*British Maritime Doctrine (JDP 0-10)*". p 1-8, Accessed April 2, 2015. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/joint-doctrine-publication-jdp>

¹⁴ UK Government, A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy...

¹⁵ Judy, Dempsey. "Is Britain Still a Foreign Policy Power?" Quartz. February 27, 2015. Accessed May 12, 2015. <http://qz.com/350598/is-britain-still-a-foreign-policy-power/>

¹⁶ Morris, Justin. "How Great is Britain? Power, Responsibility and Britain's Future Global Role." *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 13, no. 3 (2011): p327.

Foreign Policy

Current foreign policy is based on creating stability and defence engagement.¹⁷ A stable state ultimately leads to stable markets and investment opportunities, whilst defence engagement is ‘the means by which we use our defence assets and activities short of combat operations to achieve influence’.¹⁸ This influence is achieved through diplomatic and defence diplomacy to enhance market access for UK companies. This is illustrated by the relationship with Saudi Arabia, with over 15 Billion pound a year of trade, 3.8 billion of this in arms exports, so quite clearly the focus is on competing for trade above any ideas of spreading liberal values. However, beyond this mercantilist approach there has been little policy leadership since the 2011 Libya intervention. For example, the British government is one of the guarantors of the territorial integrity of Ukraine in return for it giving up a nuclear arsenal, but it conducted little diplomatic activity as the crisis unfolded.¹⁹ Correspondingly, this has also been the first government since 1912 to have no fixed wing carrier capability, which has historically been used to great effect to achieve foreign policy goals whilst minimizing political risk. In the last 5 years the only military options available to Britain involved protracted troop deployments or lengthy negotiation of basing rights for aircraft, both options that are hard to rapidly de-escalate. With less risk, the capability can be more readily used, which leads to a more pro-active foreign policy.

¹⁷ UK Government Policy, “International Defence Engagement Strategy” 6 Feb 2013, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-defence-engagement-strategy>, and “Building Stability Overseas Strategy” 1 July 2011, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-stability-overseas-strategy> Accessed 17 April, 2014.

¹⁸ UK Government Policy, “International Defence Engagement Strategy...”

¹⁹ UN Document A/49/765, *Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine’s Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*, 19 December 1994, available via <http://documents.un.org/simple.asp>, accessed 29 January 2015. House of Lords, European Union Committee, *EU and Russia: Before and beyond the crisis in Ukraine*. London: The stationary Office, 25 Feb 2015. Accessed 11 May 2015, available from <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldselect/ldcom/115/115.pdf>

THE ROLE OF AIRCRAFT CARRIERS IN INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

Key historical foreign policy decisions will be analysed, showing how the aircraft carrier was an instrumental tool to enable policy or, in most cases, to rectify a failed policy. Without this option, Britain would have been subject to humiliation and a rapid decline in power.

Belize (British Honduras) 1972

On the 26 January 1972, British intelligence received confirmed reports of an imminent Guatemalan invasion of Belize; the solitary infantry company would be defeated within hours. The closest military asset was HMS *Ark Royal*, located in the Atlantic, 2500 miles to the North East, diverted immediately; she closed to 1250 miles in 48 hours and launched Buccaneer bombers at maximum range. Using air to air refuelling to reach Belize City, they conducted a series of low passes. This provided a highly visible show of force, which was sufficient deterrent to deter invasion.²⁰ The incident was a classic example of conventional deterrence, which could only have been achieved at such short notice and with such an overwhelming show of strength, by using an aircraft carrier.²¹ At the time, HMS *Ark Royal* was the last remaining carrier in service, due to retire in 1972 it was fortuitously extended until 1978, unfortunately this was not taken as a salient warning as to the perils of losing a fixed wing carrier capability.

Britain had signalled its intentions to withdraw into Europe, both politically and physically, by running down its expeditionary forces, this provided the opportunity for Guatemala to plan the invasion of Belize without fear of rapid reinforcement. The overt show of force, achieved with highly capable bombers, signalled to all potential adversaries that Britain had the will and intent to defend its sovereign territory. This held true until further military cutbacks caused the deterrent to fail again in 1982.

²⁰ Based on first-hand accounts from: White, Roland. *Phoenix Squadron*. London: Transworld Publishers, 2009.

²¹ At the time Guatemala only had a small Air Force of obsolete P-51 Mustangs.

Falkland Islands 1982

The invasion of the Falkland Islands by Argentina in 1982 was a classic failure of conventional deterrence, much like that which led to Guatemala threatening Belize. Following the cancellation of CVA01, the RN managed to retain a small aircraft carrier capability in the form of 3 *Invincible* class ships, principally designed for Anti-Submarine Warfare in the North Atlantic, but capable of operating a limited number of Sea Harrier aircraft. The 1981 defence white paper, authored by the then Secretary of State for Defence, John Nott, clearly articulated a shift to solely supporting cold war NATO operations. The government scheduled the majority of the Navy's out of area expeditionary forces to be sold, including all the amphibious ships and HMS *Invincible* in line with its NATO focused defence policy:

Defence policy prior to April 1982 can be seen as following NATO orthodoxy by concentrating on land and air forces capable of blocking a conventional invasion of West Germany, backed up by a nuclear deterrent. Therefore, the most significant feature of the Falklands War was that it was fought well out of the NATO area and with the Royal Navy the lead service. It was precisely the war for which Britain was planning least.²²

As Britain had no plan to conduct this type of war, had Argentina waited until the policy had been fully implemented the result may have been quite different. However, following up on a long held claim to sovereignty, and in an attempt to bolster nationalist support for the military dictatorship, Argentine forces invaded the British sovereign territory on the 2nd April 1982. Three days later the lead elements of a British task group commenced the 8000 mile journey to the Islands. The task group was centered on the only available aircraft carriers, HMS *Invincible* and HMS *Hermes* (due to decommission that year). This was a conflict entirely reliant on maritime power to deliver effect, with the nearest forward operating base 3500 nm away on Ascension Island. The task group faced an Argentine adversary armed with over 500 aircraft, as such; control of the air became the defining task for the small number of Harriers:²³

²² Lawrence Freedman, *The Politics of British Defence 1979-1998*, Macmillan Press, 1999, p.83

²³ Hezely, C.B. "Argentine Air Power in the Falklands War" (Air War College Research Report, USAF, May 1988), Annex B.

Thirty or so Harriers faced between 120 and 160 Argentine fast jets, but because of high serviceability rates, a real focus in the aircraft carriers on sortie generation and the ability to operate close to the action, the advantage in terms of sorties over the area of action was 3:2 in favour of the British, with the carriers generating sorties at six times the rate of the land-based Argentine air force.²⁴

With a meagre force of 36 Harriers, the British were able to provide enough localized air control to facilitate a successful amphibious landing, which enabled the islands to be recaptured within 100 days.²⁵ This was achieved through leveraging the unique capabilities of the Aircraft Carrier against a numerically superior enemy.

The British government's 1981 Defence white paper made it clear that Britain no longer intended to conduct unilateral expeditionary operations; in essence, it was no longer able to honor its commitment to defend its overseas territories.²⁶ This was not lost on the Argentines who used it as an opportunity to invade, and strengthen their negotiating position over the Islands sovereignty. The prospect of Britain immediately and forcefully retaking the Islands was never even considered by the leadership.²⁷ Following the conflict many of the cuts to the Navy were abandoned and the emphasis changed to a more flexible and mobile force, retaining the 3 ships of the *Invincible* Class. However, the focus remained on the primary threat of the time, deterring a continental attack from the Soviet Union.²⁸

The rationale for immediately retaking the islands was not just the commitment to collective defence, but it was also driven by politics and ideology. With a dismal record in the first 3 years of power, the Thatcher government needed to show strength in the face of rapidly dwindling support from the electorate. Furthermore, in the Cold War the right to self-determination and deterrence of aggression was an ideological view that would

²⁴ Jermy, Steve. "Maritime Air Power." September 1, 2004. Accessed April 7, 2015. <https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/25jermy.pdf>

²⁵ Woodward, Sandy, and Patrick Robinson, *One Hundred Days: The Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1992.

²⁶ Taylor, Clare. "A Brief Guide to Previous British Defence Reviews." October 19, 2010. Accessed April 19, 2015. <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05714.pdf>.

²⁷ Mauro, Joseph. "The Falkland Islands War: Diplomatic Failure in April 1982." Accessed April 19, 2015.

http://historymatters.appstate.edu/sites/historymatters.appstate.edu/files/falklandislandswar_000.pdf. p22

²⁸ HANSARD, *The Falklands Campaign, The Lessons*, Cm 8758, December 1982, para 313

ensure support from the US and Europe.²⁹ The message to Britain's allies and dependents needed to be loud and clear: Britain would not stand for acts of aggression against its territory, and would honour its commitment to provide collective defence.

Operation Palliser – Sierra Leone 2000

Sierra Leone had been gripped by civil war since 1985; with the signing of the Lomé Peace Accord in July 1999, the process of disarming the two major factions, Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and Sierra Leone Army (SLA), began. Unfortunately only the SLA responded to the UN disarmament process, consequently the situation rapidly deteriorated with the RUF taking UN observers hostage and advancing on the capital Freetown. By the 3rd May 2000 it was estimated that the RUF could overrun the capital within a week.³⁰ This prompted the British government to commence an evacuation operation, which subsequently developed into a full scale intervention to establish security and support existing UN operations. The aircraft carrier HMS *Illustrious* was diverted from the Mediterranean; its Harriers were able to apply air power over Freetown within 4 days of tasking. As part of the overall deterrence, they supported the lightly equipped ground forces, provided real time intelligence to the Joint Force Commander, conducted reassurance patrols to boost morale, and delivered a credible show of force.³¹ Naval helicopters then acted as force multipliers by conducting psychological operations, rapidly repositioning troops to create the impression of a larger force.³² The mission successfully evacuated all British nationals, reassured the local population, and swiftly led to the complete disarming and demobilization of the RUF.

The operation combined all the attributes of maritime power to give political and military leverage, this gave the government a range of continuously available options, from a limited Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation to a ground intervention. Even after deployment the government strategy was still evolving in response to conditions on the ground, long term objectives were not decided until 3 weeks after the initial

²⁹ Mauro, Joseph. "The Falkland Islands War..."

³⁰ Dorman, Andrew M. *Blair's Successful War: British Military Intervention in Sierra Leone*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009. p45 – 56.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p90

³² Ministry of Defence, "*British Maritime Doctrine...* 2-6.

deployment, a luxury afforded by the flexibility of options available.³³ The foreign policy at the time was driven by Blair's 'offensive liberal' outlook:³⁴

In the end values and interests merge. If we can establish and spread the values of liberty, the rule of law, human rights and an open society then that is in our national interests too. The spread of our values makes us safer.³⁵

This intervention was precisely in line with this doctrine, aiming to stabilize a region threatened by rogue non-state actors and re-establish the rule of law. The cause was also strongly supported by the United Nations Secretary General who put pressure on the British, as the former colonial power, to intervene.³⁶ The successful application of a small but capable and adaptable force to stabilize a country became the benchmark for humanitarian interventions.³⁷ Consequently, Blair pushed for intervention in numerous African countries (Darfur, Zimbabwe) and supported his decision to join the coalition to invade Iraq in 2003.³⁸ Unfortunately conditions were never as favourable, as part of larger coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan "the offensive liberal doctrine became a mission divorced from its overarching ethical principles."³⁹ The legacy of this is reluctance for foreign interventions, as demonstrated by the government's failure to secure a vote in favour of air strikes against Syria in 2013.⁴⁰

The power projection capability of the *Invincible* class carrier was extremely limited by its size at 18,500 tonnes, but it was enough for a stabilization mission against a weak enemy. It created a disproportionately large effect from a small force, by using the limited number of aircraft as a force multiplier, creating a psychologically overwhelming

³³ Dorman, Andrew M. *Blair's Successful War...* p96.

³⁴ Gilmore, Jonathan. "The Uncertain Merger of Values and Interests..." 544.

³⁵ Blair, Tony. 'The doctrine of the international community', (Speech, given to the Economic Club, Chicago, 24 April 1999.)

³⁶ Dorman, Andrew M. *Blair's Successful War...* p58

³⁷ Penfold, Peter. *Atrocities, Diamonds and Diplomacy: The Inside Story of the Conflict in Sierra Leone*. Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2012. p192.

³⁸ Dorman, Andrew M. *Blair's Successful War...* 128-129

³⁹ McCann, T. "Global Vortex - The Commercialization of British Foreign Policy" (Joint Command and Staff Program, Canadian Forces College, 2015), p4.

⁴⁰ UK Parliament "House of Commons Debate on Syria - News from Parliament." Accessed May 11, 2015. <http://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2013/august/commons-debate-on-syria/>

display of power.⁴¹ This example clearly demonstrates the benefits of having a movable piece of British sovereign territory at a few days' notice, able to provide a secure base for operations, avoiding exposure of aircraft ashore, and minimising the land footprint.

Operation Ellamy - Libya 2011

Operation Ellamy was the British contribution to the 2011 intervention in Libya. Originally a NATO operation in response to UN resolution 1973 to enforce a no-fly zone, this developed into a ground attack mission to protect civilians. The role of HMS *Ocean* as a small rotary wing carrier proved the adaptability of carriers by concurrently operating: Army Apaches, US Search and Rescue assets, and RN Early Warning helicopters.

With no fixed wing carrier available, the Royal Air Force (RAF) flew Tornados on a 3000 mile round trip for each mission; compare this with the USS *Keearsarge*, whose Harriers were able to operate 50 miles from the targets, allowing a high sortie generation rate and flexible targeting. Even when some UK aircraft were forward based in Italy, there were restrictions on which munitions could be stored, and flights still required two mid-air refuels. Each mission flown from the UK cost £960,000 in flying hours, not including the cost of the tanker aircraft. Evidence for a defence select committee put the cost of land based air operations at 4 times that of a carrier based option, had it been available.⁴² Libya also demonstrated that allied commitment cannot always be relied upon, because only 16 of the 36 nations supporting the UN resolution provided military assistance, proving that when planning future operations allied support cannot be taken for granted. Had Italy not allowed basing rights then mission would have been almost impossible without US carrier support.⁴³

Ever since the 1960s the aircraft carrier has fought for an ever increasing slice of a shrinking defence budget, it has generally lost, subject to a gradual reduction in numbers and capability until its complete removal in 2010. This has been matched by a

⁴¹ Jermy, Steve. "Maritime Air Power."

⁴² Ellwood, Tobias. *Leveraging UK Carrier Capability*. Royal United Services Institute, Occasional Paper, RUSI 2013. p23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*,

similar decline in foreign policy aspirations, with the UK now branded as a ‘foreign policy irrelevance.’⁴⁴ Whilst this decline was not caused by the lack of aircraft carriers, the two are inexorably linked; the reintroduction of a large carrier force in 2018 will be a step to reversing this decline by enabling greater foreign policy ambition, through having the means to achieve it.

THE STRATEGIC UTILITY OF AIRCRAFT CARRIERS

All the major political parties have committed to further fiscal measures to address the budget deficit, as defence is not one of the protected departments (health, education and overseas aid), it is likely to take further cuts following the general election. The ongoing commitment to delivering the future aircraft carrier force in 2018 will eat up an increasingly large share of defence capital. This will however, represent value for money by delivering foreign policy options not held since the 1960s, this will have a disproportionately large effect on Britain’s ability to influence the actions of its European and American allies, and its growing number of potential trading partners.

Whenever a defence review has reduced expenditure, carriers are often the first target for cuts. In the 1966 defence white paper it was argued that the “UK would not undertake major operations of war except in co-operation with allies.”⁴⁵ This focus on NATO Cold War defence led to a reduction in expeditionary capability throughout the 70s and 80s, based on the assumption that the USA would provide the required capability, whilst the UK focused on European defence. The Healey defence review in 1968 accelerated withdrawal from Singapore, Malaysia and the Persian Gulf; the Mason Review in 1974 confirmed that ‘Britain’s forces should be concentrated in Europe.’⁴⁶ These assumptions were completely undermined by the threat to invade Belize and the invasion of the Falkland Islands, likewise Libya proved that allies cannot always be relied upon to deliver, even for a NATO mission.

⁴⁴ Riley-Smith, Ben. “David Cameron a ‘foreign Policy Irrelevance’...”

⁴⁵ HANSARD. *Statement on the Defence Estimates 1966: Part I The Defence Review*, Cm 2901, February 1966.

⁴⁶ Taylor, Claire. *A Brief Guide to Previous British Defence Reviews*, House of Commons Library SN/IA/5714, 19 Oct 2010, p5, available from: <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05714.pdf>

CAPT Hendrix USN in his paper ‘at what cost a carrier?’ argues that they are ‘big, expensive, vulnerable – and surprisingly irrelevant to the conflicts of this time.’⁴⁷ He offers an alternative means to achieve a global naval presence: multiple small platforms carrying cruise missiles and Unmanned Aerial Combat Vehicles, providing a precision strike capacity. Critics of carrier power such as Hendrix are entrenched in conventional thinking of an aircraft carrier as only capable of executing the right side of the kill chain, i.e. Carrier Strike. Britain has proved, on a smaller scale, the potential for carriers to be used across the spectrum of warfare from hard kill to physiological operations (Sierra Leone), through to soft power options such as: show of force (Belize), disaster relief, hosting trade missions, and acting as a shop window for Britain’s industrial capacity.⁴⁸

Vulnerability is a criticism often levelled at the carrier, as a large mission essential unit it needs to be defended by ‘an ever-larger ring of exquisite technologies in order to launch a historically shrinking number of very expensive aircraft.’⁴⁹ It is true that a large and capable fleet of escorts is required, but this can be tailored to the threat, currently only China or Russia have the capability to execute an existential attack on a carrier task group.⁵⁰ This would require total state on state war, which would also signal a failure of the complimentary strategic nuclear deterrent. The majority of missions will be conducted against states or groups with little capacity to mount a direct attack, the stand-of range of the carrier can be adjusted according to the capability of the enemy, and its speed of manoeuvre used to provide concealment in the vastness of the ocean.

Enabling smart power

The historical case studies also prove another important point: the future security environment is going to be both unpredictable and uncertain. If Britain is to play a role in

⁴⁷ Hendrix J, Henry. *At What Cost a Carrier*. Center for a New American Security, March 2013. p3. Available from:

http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS%20Carrier_Hendrix_FINAL.pdf

⁴⁸ HMS *Illustrious* deployed to the Philippines to provide fresh water, manpower, and 7 helicopters to support the disaster relief. Info from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/extra-british-military-support-for-philippines-aid-effort>

⁴⁹ Hendrix J, Henry. *At What Cost a Carrier...p9*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

applying power to stabilizing that environment for its own interests, then it must have the full spectrum of diplomatic, economic and military options at its disposal. Joseph Nye asserts that power is ‘one’s ability to affect the behaviour of others to get what one wants....through coercion [hard power], payment, and attraction [soft power].’⁵¹ Smart power is using the full range of tools from hard to soft power, Nye states that figuring out how to combine hard and soft power into a smart strategy requires ‘Contextual Intelligence’, it also requires that a country has the assets available at its disposal to provide a choice, which in terms of hard power, Britain has not had since 2010 and only in a very limited capacity before then. The Aircraft Carrier can deliver the more extreme hard power options, multiple air strikes or support to a land invasion, through to less kinetic options such as, moving troops by helicopter, or a more benign show of force with over-flights. It can also contribute to the soft power option: used as a base for diplomacy, hosting trade missions and industrial fairs, defence engagement through interaction with local forces, and support to governments with humanitarian aid.

The Libya campaign demonstrated that by having to rely on expensive long range missions and foreign basing, it severely constrained the hard power options. Having a binary choice is the antithesis of smart power; once aircraft and troops are deployed on foreign soil it is harder to withdraw, leading to mission creep and over-commitment:

Governments want the maximum number of diplomatic options to be available – to be able to take actions that are easily reversible, to signal intent and to escalate or de-escalate pressure – whilst contending with the least number of constraints and restrictions.⁵²

Having maritime based strike, intelligence, and reconnaissance assets, allows the government to poise covertly or overtly, depending on the intentions, whilst building first hand situational awareness. This can all be achieved without any commitment to extended land deployments, and the political baggage that results, in essence it offers a Prime Minister ‘effects without regrets.’⁵³ This also facilitates closer co-operation with

⁵¹ Nye S, Joseph. “Get Smart – Combining Hard and Soft Power,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug 2009. p160.

⁵² Ellwood, Tobias. *Leveraging UK Carrier Capability...* p8

⁵³ *Ibid.*,

countries who would welcome British military power in times of trouble, but would not want the political embarrassment of permanent foreign forces billeted in country.⁵⁴

Professor Gray stated: the value of the Navy is its ability to prevent wars; this is achieved through a persistent presence in regions of interest.⁵⁵ The ability for global engagement by simply being there and building partnerships alongside other government departments, achieves influence without embroilment.⁵⁶ A frigate can achieve this and signal national intent, but it cannot provide the scalability of deterrent or role flexibility offered by an aircraft carrier.

Humanitarian Role

The softer end of the capability spectrum is the aircraft carriers role in upstream conflict prevention, this is difficult to quantify and is thus often underestimated. Humanitarian assistance is just one example of how an aircraft carrier can contribute towards the Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS).⁵⁷ Able to provide command and control and act as an airfield for up to 50 helicopters, it demonstrates a huge commitment to humanitarian needs. It would also be a focal point for the integrated approach (whole of government) to BSOS supporting: expeditionary diplomacy; stabilisation response teams; defence engagement; rapid crisis response; and most importantly, through its overt presence and vast capability, providing public reassurance.⁵⁸

Military reputation

When the carrier debate began in 1960, it was argued by senior naval strategists such as Admiral Sir Mansergh, that to carry a worthwhile complement of aircraft, carriers needed to be so large and expensive that they would ‘represent too high a percentage of

⁵⁴ Explanatory statement on the Navy Estimate 1957, quoted in Editors Notes, *Naval Review* (1957) 3,251.

⁵⁵ Gray, Colin S. *The Leverage of Sea Power: The Strategic Advantage of Navies in War*. (New York: Free Press, 1992.)

⁵⁶ Zambellas, George. (Speech, First Sea Lord address to Global Strategy Forum, National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, 19 June 2012.)

⁵⁷ UK Government Policy. “Building Stability Overseas Strategy”

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

the country's naval stock-in-trade to put on one keel.'⁵⁹ This suggests that the sacrifice in terms of Frigates and Destroyers required to pay for the *Queen Elizabeth* (QE) class has been too great, a larger number of surface escorts could increase the Royal Navy presence around the globe. Whilst the global footprint would be greater, the influence would be less. Few NATO countries operate carriers, with only the USA able to offer a capability comparable to that of the QE class, on the other hand, NATO countries can field numerous Frigates and Destroyers.⁶⁰ The UK contributing another Frigate would not enhance NATO's capability as much as an aircraft carrier, in-fact the US hopes that a UK carrier task group could occasionally replace one of its 11 deployed task groups, strengthening the UK-US relationship, giving the UK a lever with its most important ally.⁶¹ In terms of military reputation this will strengthen Britain's position as Europe's leading military power, giving it a stronger voice in defence and security matters.⁶² With the UK providing an aircraft carrier to an international task group, it controls the mission essential unit and can determine the viability of the mission, thus achieving significant political influence in determining if, and how, a mission should occur, furthermore this will increase the likelihood of British overall command.

This influence will also have secondary effects in the soft power world of diplomacy, as this huge contribution to EU and NATO operations can be used as a lever to influence other diplomatic aims. 'The *Queen Elizabeth* class carriers will offer the UK political leverage out of proportion to the equivalent tonnage of surface escorts.'⁶³ There will always be a requirement for allied support to expeditionary operations, but there is a greater chance of the UK being able to achieve its policy aims without being beholden to other states, if all they are required to provide is a surface escort or supply ship, rather than the mission essential unit.

⁵⁹ Mansergh, V Adm Sir Aubrey. 'Editors Notes', *Naval Review* (1966) 3, 179-80.

⁶⁰ EU NATO countries with aircraft carriers: Italy 2x Small Carriers, the newest being the *Cavour* at 735ft (due to operate 10 F-35B). Spain operates the aging *Príncipe de Asturias* at 643ft (rumored to be retiring). France operates the *Charles de Gaulle*, a nuclear powered carrier 858ft long.

⁶¹ RAeS Maritime Air Power Group, *Current and Future Maritime Air Power for the United Kingdom*, RAeS, July 2014. p6 www.aerosociety.com

⁶² Ellwood, Tobias. *Leveraging UK Carrier Capability...* p9

⁶³ RAeS Maritime Air Power Group, *Current and Future Maritime Air Power...* p7

THE FUTURE – CARRIER ENABLED POWER PROJECTION

The essence of maritime power is the ability to influence events on land.

- JDP 0-10 British Maritime Doctrine

Admiral Gorshkov, known by many as the father of the modern Soviet Navy, in his 1976 book *Sea Power of the State*, articulated the strategic importance of the oceans for great states.⁶⁴ He argued that no longer will navies be primarily used against other navies, but the principal role is to project power ashore, to destroy the economic potential of the enemy from the sea, thus nuclear submarines and maritime aviation become the critical assets.

When dealing with powerful state on state conflict, this is still as relevant today as it was in 1976, hence the doctrine of *Carrier Strike*, for which, the *Queen Elizabeth* class ship was primarily designed. However, the uncertainty of today's world, the changing nature of conflict, and the requirement for fiscal restraint, necessitates that 'the greatest possible range of options must be generated from a dwindling resource base to meet the ever widening spectrum of security challenges.'⁶⁵ This had led current British doctrine to *influence* events on land, rather than focusing on complete economic destruction. The UK must leverage maximum capability from the new carriers to ensure they are relevant to today's environment, but it must also be careful not to forget the lessons from Admiral Gorshkov, and maintain a conventional deterrent to complement the nuclear option.

HMS *Queen Elizabeth* will be fully operational in 2020, with HMS *Prince of Wales* following a few years later, providing the Royal Navy with a continuously at sea carrier force. It has been decided to buy the F-35B, a 5th generation stealth aircraft, delivering the most advanced first strike capability in the world, allowing full airborne interoperability with the US and a growing coalition of F-35 operators. The exact make-up of the air wing is still being debated; however it is certain that not enough F-35Bs will be purchased to allow for the maximum full time air wing of 36 jets. This may play to

⁶⁴ Gorshkov, S.G. "The Sea Power of the State," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 19:1, 24-29.

⁶⁵ Cornish, Paul, and Andrew M. Dorman. "Fifty Shades of Purple? A Risk-sharing Approach to the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review." *International Affairs*, 2013, 1183-202.

the carriers' advantages, allowing the air group to be tailored to the mission, with a combination of rotary wing assets from the UK or coalition partners.

To emphasise the flexibility of 4.5 acres of deployable sovereign territory in meeting the needs of today's security environment, the carrier capability has been rebranded from Carrier Strike to Carrier Enabled Power Projection. Rapidly tailoring the air group in response to the mission is a concept proven in the smaller rotary wing carrier operations in Libya, where a mixed group of allied helicopters operated from HMS *Ocean* to defend civilians in a complex security environment. However, to be a credible deterrent against states, it is also necessary to maintain the ability to rapidly escalate into the traditional Carrier Strike role with 36 F-35 jets. To do this, a minimum complement of fixed wing aircraft must be continuously embarked to maintain operational currency and provide the full spectrum of options when required.

Whilst the nature of future conflicts cannot be predicted, the *Queen Elizabeth* class will offer the government an ability to participate and withdraw at will, without deploying ground forces. In Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom), 78% of sorties were flown from aircraft carriers, if the UK had this option, it could have delayed the commitment of ground forces without compromising its relationship with the US.⁶⁶ Likewise, France is currently supporting the campaign against the Islamic State from its aircraft carrier *Charles De Gaulle*, halving the time it takes to attack targets in Iraq when compared to its land base in the UAE, an option that Britain will have in 2020.

CONCLUSION

By reviewing Britain's military engagements since 1960 it can be seen that delivery of carrier air power has been synonymous with Britain's capability to influence events and defend overseas territories. Successfully employed in a range of conflicts from conventional war against a state to stabilizing a civil war, the history of the aircraft carrier is testament to its utility. Despite this, shrinking foreign ambitions led to a loss of

⁶⁶ Jermy, Steve. "Maritime Air Power." p86.

capability, marking time until the future carrier force sets sail to embark on a new era in British global engagement.

An aircraft carrier ‘backs up the words of its leaders with indisputable presence’ and the future *Queen Elizabeth* carrier force will be a clear statement that Britain intends to maintain freedom of movement around the globe.⁶⁷ With 95% of British economic activity depending on the Oceans, protecting its trade routes, trading partners, and dependant nations, will be increasingly important as emerging economies compete for the global market and strengthen their own maritime power.⁶⁸ The case for continued investment in aircraft carriers is strong; their contribution to stabilising countries and defending economic interests will deliver a return on investment many times over. To achieve this, the air wing must be properly financed and able to maintain a continuous at sea presence.

Whilst expensive, their ability to yield influence with both allies and potential adversaries is unmatched by any other military option. Having a ‘fast, highly mobile... zero- footprint, deployed operating base’ from which, a range of expeditionary or strike forces can be deployed or postured at a time and place of the governments choosing, is not just a symbol of power but the essence of smart power.⁶⁹ The carrier force will be able to provide everything from a non-nuclear strategic deterrent to humanitarian aid, showcasing Britain’s *capability* and *will* to defend its interests. It is also hoped that the increased range of diplomatic and military options will breathe life into the government’s foreign policy, enabling less risky military engagement, and encouraging more active participation on the world stage to reverse the decline of British power.

⁶⁷ Petitt, Captain Simon, Senior Naval Officer of HMS Queen Elizabeth, quoted on RN website available at <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/features/equipped-for-the-future>

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁹ Jermy, Steve. “Maritime Air Power.” p87.

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