

MARITIME NEWS – 17 NOVEMBER 2016

Are Royal Navy Bases “Dilapidated”?



A lack of funding at Portsmouth naval base could threaten the ability of the Royal Navy's two new aircraft carriers to operate. **Photo : Matt Cardy (Via The Guardian)**

The operational readiness of the UK's armed forces is at risk because the country's military bases and infrastructure have become too dilapidated to use effectively, Whitehall's independent auditor has found. The National Audit Office has examined properties and land controlled by the Ministry of Defence, which cover nearly 2% of the UK's landmass, and found that they need £8.5bn of investment so that they can be used efficiently to react to any military threats.

"There is a significant risk that the poor condition of the estate will affect the department's ability to provide the defence capability needed," the NAO report, published on Tuesday, said. "As the estate's condition deteriorates, some parts may wholly or partially close. This will exacerbate other risks and could reduce operational readiness."

Financial pressures have meant that since 2009, the MoD has been forced to abandon its programme of improvement works, auditors explained. This has reduced service levels to those needed to keep the estate "safe and legal", resulting in a "general deterioration" in the overall condition. Auditors said the extent of the deterioration could now jeopardise the delivery of new and existing military capabilities.

Problems include a lack of funding at Portsmouth naval base, which could threaten the ability of the Royal Navy's two new aircraft carriers to operate. Cables that are supposed to provide energy to the Queen Elizabeth and the Prince of Wales – the largest ships to be built for the Royal Navy – have not been replaced, the report disclosed.

"This may jeopardise the carriers' ability to operate. For example, the cables that supply power to the base and carriers are more than 80 years old. They need replacing, but there is no funding available to do this," it said. **Source : Guardian News & Media Ltd**

Indian Navy to Buy Seven Corvettes for \$2 Billion

NEW DELHI - The Indian navy plans to acquire seven new-generation guided missile corvettes at a cost of \$2 billion to replace its Russian-built 1241-RE missile boats, allowing only domestic companies to bid under the government's "Make in India" rules. While the ships themselves must be constructed at an Indian shipyard, some major systems of the boats, particularly the weaponry, will be imported, an Indian Navy official said.

"I suppose most of the leading European and Russian shipyards will be in the fray," says Anil Jai Singh, retired Indian navy commodore and defense analyst. "The imports could be the Short Range Surface to Air Missile SRSAM, surveillance radars, torpedoes and engines. The rest can be Indian -- that is, the gun, surface-to-surface missile systems, rockets, sonars, most of the navigation communications and electronic-warfare systems," says Sujeet Samaddar, another former Indian navy official and defense analyst.

The Indian sea service wants the new corvettes to have longer range than the old boats, capable of offensive nuclear submarines attack, anti-submarine warfare, local naval defense, maritime interdiction operations, and visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) operations, according to the a request for proposals sent to Indian industry. "Missile

corvettes are agile high-speed ships with considerable firepower, ideal for a littoral environment. These corvettes will probably have a potent anti-ship missile capability with an adequate point defense missile system and incorporating advanced stealth technologies," says Singh.

The formal tender for the new generation corvettes will be given to domestic shipyards next year and is likely to be sent to state-owned Mazagon Docks Ltd., Garden Research Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd. (GRSE), Hindustan Shipyard Ltd. and Cochin Shipyard Ltd. Private-sector companies considered in the running are Reliance Defence and Engineering Ltd (RDEL) - formerly known as Pipavav Defence - as well as Offshore Engineering and Larsen & Toubro (L&T) Ltd., according to a Ministry of Defence (MoD) official.

So far only state-owned MDL and GRSE have built such complex corvettes in past, the Indian navy official noted. "GRSE, Reliance and L&T should be the front-runners," says Singh. The big-ticket ships purchase comes at a time when the defense budget for the last two years has been nearly flat, raising questions over financing. "I understand the long-term prospective plan for 2017-32 has been prepared and budgetary support for the programs is included," says Samaddar.

That plan, unveiled early this year, calls for acquiring a range of futuristic technologies. These include naval missiles and guns, propulsion and power generation, surveillance and detection systems, futuristic torpedoes and directed-energy weapons, submarines and anti-submarine warfare, naval aviation, network-centric warfare equipment and combat management systems. "By 2027, Indian Navy plans to have 200 warships from the present number of around 140," the Indian navy official said. **Source : SUBSIM**

This supplements the report in a previous issue. The aim of 200 warships should add impetus to Mr Trump's plan to grow the USN. Will be painful for the ex colonial power whose fleet is fast declining, I am afraid.



IRINS Bushehr (422) Bandar Abbas class replenishment ship seen in Durban. Photo : Trevor Jones

Built in Germany in 1974, she is equipped with two pairs of twin 23mm guns and two 20mm guns. She is also used for patrol duties. She arrived on Tuesday unexpectedly.

The Royal Navy Is About to Lose Its Missiles

A lack of money means the Senior Service is going back to sinking ships with guns.

The Royal Navy will soon retire its anti-ship missiles, leaving the force with only guns to engage other warships. Although replacements for the missiles are available, there are no plans to replace them for up to a decade. It's just part of a long, sad decline of the "Senior Service." The Royal Navy's American-made Harpoon missiles are set to expire in 2018. Designed to sink enemy ships, Harpoon missiles have a range of 80 miles and a 488-lb. high explosive warhead. Harpoon is a combat-proven missile, having been used against Iranian and Libyan naval forces in the 1980s.

Replacement missiles are not hard to find. There are newer versions of the infamous French Exocet missile, as well as the Harpoon missile itself. Norway's Naval Strike Missile, an entirely new design, is under evaluation for equipping the U.S. Navy's Littoral Combat Ships. The problem is money. Unnamed naval sources told the Telegraph there was no funding to replace Harpoon and it could take "up to a decade" for money to become available. That might be due to

the construction of the Royal Navy's two new **HMS Queen Elizabeth** class aircraft carriers, and the development of the new **HMS Dreadnought** ballistic missile submarines.

In the meantime, the Royal Navy's frigates and destroyers will be stuck with bombarding enemy ships with their 4.5-inch deck guns. Those guns have a maximum range of just 17 miles. In the event of a face-off with a Russian Neustrashimyy-class frigate, a ship like the Royal Navy's brand-new **Daring** class destroyer will be at a 51-mile disadvantage. To hurt the much smaller **Neustrashimyy**, the **Daring** would have to sail to within 17 miles, well within the range of the Russian frigate's eight deadly Kh-35 anti-ship missiles. The **Daring** would likely have to fend off all eight missiles before it even had a chance to shoot back.

It gets worse. Any potential adversary with anti-ship missiles will be actively seeking to make sure a Royal Navy ship can't get within gun range, and 51 miles is plenty of time and distance to keep it that way. Unless the enemy ship was considerably slower than the **Daring**, it would find it easy to stay one step ahead of the British.

In the meantime, the Royal Navy plans to field the Sea Venom missile within the next two years. Sea Venom is an anti-ship missile the RN will equip its Wildcat helicopters with, starting in 2018. While an advanced missile, Sea Venom is meant for tackling smaller boats. A Russian frigate or larger will shrug off the Sea Venom's puny 60-lb. warhead—that is, if the helicopter carrying it isn't shot down first. Until the anti-ship missile issue is fixed, one of the finest navies in the world will be at a critical disadvantage. Against any competent navy in a ship vs ship fight, the Royal Navy is in for a humiliating defeat. **Source : The Telegraph**

Another repeat report that supplements the story. If this is true, the SSBN requirement seems really questionable. Without SSMs the surface fleet could be sitting ducks.

China's first aircraft carrier 'combat ready'

The People's Liberation Army Navy's first aircraft carrier is ready to meet threats on the battlefield, Chinese media reports.

The vessel, named after the Chinese province of Liaoning after being purchased from Ukraine, was deemed combat-ready after years of refitting and sea trials. Initially laid down as an Admiral Kuznetsov-class carrier for the Soviet Navy in the 1980s, the ship has primarily been used by China for training missions, according to IHS Janes.

While Chinese military officials concede there is still a technological gap between the Liaoning and the carriers used by the United States, they are confident their modernization efforts have been effective.

"As a military force, we are always combat ready and our combat capacity also needs to be tested by war," PLAN Senior Captain Dongyou Li told the Global Times, a Chinese daily newspaper. "At this moment, we are doing our best to promote our strength and use it to prevent war. But we are preparing for actual combat at any time."



The combat-ready assessment follows a visit from three senior U.S. military officers, who Chinese naval leaders say approved of their equipment and maintenance capabilities. Chinese media reports 1,000 non-commissioned officers currently serve on the Liaoning, in addition to 42 chief petty officers with an average 20 years serving the People's Liberation Army Navy.

"Weaponry is the key for combat capability on the carrier. As China's first generation of NCOs on the carrier, these officers' capability on how to operate, repair and maintain equipment is irreplaceable. And they are the source of our confidence," Li added. Chinese military leaders have yet to disclose exactly how the Liaoning will be used. The recent announcement comes as U.S. and Chinese authorities spar over China's activities in the South China Sea. **Source : Space War**

Bomb disposal experts destroy WWII bomb found in Portsmouth harbour

Royal Navy bomb disposal experts have destroyed a German World War II bomb found in Portsmouth Harbour during dredging work on Wednesday. The World War II device was found by a barge dredging the harbour – part of a raft of infrastructure upgrades taking place in readiness for the arrival of the Royal Navy's new 65,000-tonne aircraft carrier.

The bomb was towed out to open waters 1.5 miles east of the Isle of Wight where a controlled explosion took place at 4pm. Shipping movements were restricted while the device was towed out through the harbour entrance.



Photo: Royal Navy

Commander Del McKnight, the Commanding Officer of the Royal Navy's Fleet Diving Squadron, said: "Everything went smoothly and we were pleased to be able to get the operation completed in daylight today. Despite being old, these devices still pose a very serious threat when they are moved.

"Last year we had more than 450 call-outs around the UK so this is really business as usual for us. We've had more call-outs to Portsmouth than we would usually see, because of the extent of the dredging works being done to make way for **HMS Queen Elizabeth**, but we have teams on standby at 10 minutes notice around the UK ready to deal with these things." **Source : Naval Today**

Britain rules out resettlement of US naval base islands

Britain on Wednesday ruled out resettling inhabitants of the British-controlled Chagos Islands in their homeland, promising £40 million (47 million Euros, \$50 million) for the exiled communities instead. The announcement marks the latest twist in a dispute following the expulsion of the Indian Ocean islands' residents in 1973 and the establishment of a vital US military base on one of its atolls, Diego Garcia.

The government also said it was renewing the agreement with the United States to host the base, which would have run out this year, until 2036. "I am today announcing that the government has decided against resettlement of the Chagossian people to the British Indian Ocean Territory on the grounds of feasibility, defence and security interests, and cost to the British taxpayer," junior foreign minister Joyce Anelay told parliament.

"In coming to this decision the government has considered carefully the practicalities of setting up a small remote community on low-lying islands and the challenges that any community would face. "The government has also considered the interaction of any potential community with the US naval support facility -- a vital part of our defence relationship," Anelay said in a statement.

The funding for exiled Chagossians, who live mainly in Britain, Mauritius and the Seychelles, will be available over a 10-year period and will be used to fund health and social care, education and jobs. Anelay said the fund would also be used for a "significantly expanded programme" of visits to the Chagos Islands for the former residents.

But supporters of the Chagossians' campaign to return to their islands voiced their disappointment. Adventurer and television presenter Ben Fogle, patron of the UK Chagos Support Association, said: "It's another heartbreaking day for the Chagossian community, who have repeatedly been betrayed and abused by their own government. "That even



now, with so many reasons to support their return, the government has failed to do the right thing, makes this a dark day in our country's history." Poet and writer Benjamin Zephaniah, also a patron of the association, added: "Once again, the people of the Chagos Islands are met with injustice".

As its colonial empire collapsed, Britain purchased the Chagos Islands from Mauritius in 1965. A year later Britain leased the Chagos Islands to the US for 50 years -- until December 2016. Between 1968 and 1973 around 2,000 Chagos Islanders were uprooted, a process blithely described in a British diplomatic cable of the time as the removal of "some few Tarzans and Man Fridays". Most were shipped to Mauritius and the Seychelles.

The strategic nature of the remote and isolated Diego Garcia base became increasingly important through the 1970s as the fall of Saigon, the Khmer Rouge takeover of Cambodia and an assertive Soviet navy extended communist influence in the Indian Ocean. Later, it became a staging ground for the US bombing campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. Today, there are estimated to be around 10,000 Chagossians and their descendants. **Source : Space War**

RFA Wave Knight's helicopter in action in Tobago



Photo: Royal Navy

Having recently used its helicopter to successfully stop a high-speed cocaine chase, the crew of the UK's naval tanker **RFA Wave Knight** were part of a scenario in which they helped islanders on Tobago cope after being lashed by 110 mph winds. The Lynx helicopter flew emergency supplies and medical stores to the village of Charlottesville, which bore the brunt of the category 3 hurricane.

The helicopter winchman was lowered to deliver the medical supplies, whilst engineers carried out repairs to the fast rescue craft used by the Tobago Emergency Management Agency. The Brits found the island's authorities very much prepared for a disaster: a database of everyone known to have special medical requirements is held, for example, and there were live feeds from across the island coming into the operations room – and live feeds going back out showing what was being done to help islanders.

As well as simulated assistance for Tobagonians, there was genuine help in the form of three community projects for the HADR troops to get stuck into. Parts of the Olive Sawyer Day Care Centre needed painting in keeping with the sky-blue colour scheme of the main building, which the team completed in under a day, then swept aside reeds up to eight-feet tall ("it needed some serious weed whacking") in the back garden.

An old armoury at Roxborough Secondary School on the opposite side of the island was next to benefit from the HADR troops' selflessness. A store for deactivated Lee Enfield rifles used by the school's naval cadets needed painting and some new racks to hold extra guns. And just for good measure, Joshua Boys Home on Trinidad also needed a spruce up when the tanker made the short trip to the neighbouring island.

Despite only housing 12 youngsters, the orphanage still required two days of hard graft to paint both the building and surrounding wall in the grounds – even with the help of the boys who, brushes in hand, were supervised adding some colour to the wall. **Source : Naval Today**

The Royal Navy in all but name!

New VVIP aircraft still on the table – Mapisa-Nqakula

Armcor might have cancelled the last tender to lease a VVIP aircraft for the SA Air Force's 21 Squadron but Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula maintains one will be acquired. She was reported as telling MPs in the National Assembly the acquisition of a new VVIP aircraft was still on the table and the Defence Council had decided the process for "a full acquisition" should proceed. One who was particularly incensed by the way the Defence Minister responded to questions in the National Assembly this week was opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) party shadow defence minister Kobus Marais.

He wanted to know if SAAF Chief Lieutenant General Zakes Msimang was "lying" when he told the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans (PCDMV) earlier this year the presidential jet was safe and serviceable. Mapisa-Nqakula is reported as responding: "It's always easy for officials to say yes, it's serviceable, or yes it's not serviceable. At times it takes time to even understand what it means to be unserviceable. At least it has taken me years to understand that".

Following yesterday's question session Marais again confirmed to defenceWeb that Msimang told him all 21 Squadron's aircraft were safe and in serviceable condition. "The emphasis was on all." In addition to the Boeing 737 bizjet Inkwazi, the AFB Waterkloof-based squadron operates a Falcon 900B, two Falcon 50s and, according to the official SAAF website, a Cessna Citation II. In November last year Armcor issued a Request for Information (RfI) for a VVIP jet which the acquisition agency's chief executive, Kevin Wakeford, said the minister wanted delivered to AFB Waterkloof by the end of March this year.

Tender documentation was submitted and nothing further was heard until a second RfI was issued in August – this one to lease a VVIP aircraft. Apparently tenders submitted for the first acquisition offer were deemed to fall short of the specifications set. The tender to lease was also cancelled with Wakeford explaining that "none of the bids achieved a full score in the overall evaluation, prompting cancellation of the tender". He said last month it would be back to the drawing board for Armcor as far as VVIP aircraft acquisition was concerned.

Marais is adamant Mapisa-Nqakula's department must reprioritise expenditure to fit current funding. "The SAAF is suffering because there isn't enough money to keep spares for routine maintenance and 'snag' repairs. Long haul cargo and troop carrier aircraft stock are depleted and obsolete. Additionally there are basically no aircraft to patrol land and sea borders, the latter also in support of the ocean economy sector of Operation Phakisa. "The Minister has erred in analysing and effectively addressing the real challenges and priorities. There is no reason to be confident going into the future," he said. **Source : defenceWeb**

Will the pain never end? They are still trying to buy a luxurious jet but the OPVs are on hold through lack of funding!

READER COMMENT

Ref : "Russian Navy MiG-29K crashed returning to aircraft carrier. The USN has regularly, over the years, stated that that it takes 20 years of committed investment , development and training to build carrier operations capability. Take-off and landing can be achieved in 5 – 8 years. I think the Russians are paying the price of 'rust' built up over years of inaction."

I wouldn't worry too much about losing a MIG 29 especially as we do not know why it was lost. And the crew were apparently saved-so it was a good day.. The thing is that the Russian navy is getting back in the game and achieving the (limited) aim of achieving tactical power projection with a small fixed wing air group on an old (1980's) and tired ship. Trouble with naval aviation on a limited budget is it's often like the punch line from the old Irish joke " if I was going to Dublin, I wouldn't start from here". So the life of limited choices is of necessity a compromise with sub optimal components. I expect in the near future all things being equal (they seldom are), that the ship's power plant will be fixed/replaced, a catapult will be installed, airframes will be beefed up to sustain the additional stress imposed etc etc. Such is life. Bottom line is that the Russian Navy is 'doing the business' and improving.

NB - I regret to advise that I will be doing presentations in Pinelands and Parow (almost in Gauteng!) tomorrow and away from home until 2300B. Thus there will be no Marnews on 18 Nov unless war breaks out, in which case it will be a very late final.

AGS