



British
High Commission
New Delhi

**India/UK: Toward a stronger maritime partnership in the Indian
Ocean Region, 27 Feb 2019 –**

Welcome by Dominic Asquith, British High Commissioner to India

Welcome everyone.

We are here today because we recognise the importance of the Indian Ocean to our collective future.

We are here, because we share a vision; reaffirmed by PM Modi and May in April 2018 at CHOGM, when they agreed that the UK and India would deepen co-operation, to ensure a free, open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

I am here today to provide an overview of the UK's approach so that you know us better when it comes to working together on Maritime issues in the IOR.

You are here to help us address where our collective efforts might best lie.

Today I want to prompt debate by concentrating on 2 areas:

- Our enduring presence in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Our policies and activities that meet tomorrow's challenges.

By the end, I want you to remember two key messages. That:

- **The UK has long enjoyed maritime collaboration with India; and where we don't yet have collaboration, we are working on it.**

And

- **The UK's response to the IOR is enduring and already meeting tomorrow's needs.**

Let me expand:

Let's start with the big picture

Our 2014 National Security Maritime Strategy remains the building block to our approach today.

Our global objectives are in a nut shell:

- To promote and secure the International Maritime Domain and norms,
- To develop the capabilities of States of strategic maritime importance,

- To protect the UK and its Overseas Territories including from crime and illegal activity,
- To protect and secure maritime trade and energy routes

The UK has this strategy because we have always been and always will be a seafaring nation.

Simply put, the Ocean matters to us. But why? Because

- 95% of our exports are transported by sea.
- Our maritime industry contributes £14Bn directly and £18Bn indirectly to the UK economy and 1 in every 50 jobs.
- We have the 5th largest marine estate in the world, covering the UK and 14 OTs;

Our strategic approach is as follows.

- We first seek to **UNDERSTAND** the Maritime Domain
- We then seek to **INFLUENCE**. We do this by solving global issues and maintaining security with others; be it through diplomacy, law enforcement, military and economic activity. And we influence those from acting against us through an activist foreign policy, with a firm commitment to the RBIS. This might mean supporting unimpeded commercial transport or peaceful resolution of disputes based on International law, or via UNCLOS where we work with States to bring others into compliance.

- Then we **PREVENT**. We know that capacity building helps stop instability. So
 - We share important information with partners.
 - We support their law enforcers and coastguards to help them better monitor their waters, and contribute to regional and international efforts.
 - We work in partnership with other States. We are proud of our counter-piracy efforts off the Horn of Africa which we will continue;
 - We also defend freedom of navigation and overflight, for which we shoulder much responsibility.
- Then we **PROTECT**.
 - We are in the Gulf as part of the Combined Maritime Forces, an enduring global partnership made up of 33 willing nations. It is based in Bahrain and conducts counter terrorism, piracy and maritime security in the WIO. It's a US led partnership for which the UK provides the Deputy Commander.
 - The UK Maritime and Trade Organisation in Dubai houses part of the Royal Navy, who operate a 'see and avoid' approach for our ships. We share information on the WIO with other partners like India.
 - Elsewhere we work through private security patrols to protect ourselves from illegal activity. Our National Crime Agency and Royal Navy also disrupt much criminal activity on the ocean.

At the centre of all this effort is **integration and collaboration** with other partners.

I like to think of this as a Force for Good.

So looping back to my first message –

- **The UK has long enjoyed maritime collaboration with India; and where we don't yet have collaboration, we are working on it**

Here are some practical examples

On UNDERSTANDING, we have a White Shipping Agreement with India where we share information covering the whole of the IOR. In one 24 hour period alone, this information benefitted 76 Indian vessels along a vulnerable route.

On INFLUENCING we take an active role in IOR regional architecture such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) the latter of which we are members through the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). We are a dialogue partner in IORA. We are a P5 member in the UN where we lead advocacy on international norms. We are a strong supporter of the Djibouti Code of Conduct.

On PREVENTING, we maintain a permanent physical presence in the region through the BIOT. As well as countering growing threats from state and non-state actors, our UK/US base on BIOT supports counter-narcotics, anti-human trafficking and we counter illegal fishing operations in the IOR. We have also supported humanitarian responses to numerous natural disasters in the region.

Beyond our territory the UK is present through British Forces Brunei, the British Defence Singapore Support Unit, our regional and logistics hub in Duqm, Oman and through the UK Maritime Component Command (UKMCC) in Bahrain which is responsible for The Royal Navy's contribution to maritime security in the region.

In the IOR we coordinate and lead the combined efforts of UK warships, aircraft and over 1000 deployed naval personnel in the Op KIPION Joint Operating Area, where we maintain UK warships at sea 365 days a year.

On PROTECTING, the annual Exercise KONKAN allows our navies to share expertise and identify future collaborative opportunities to make the Indian Ocean a safer place for maritime trade. To illustrate this, on its way to the exercise, last year, HMS Dragon intercepted a shipment of over 3,000KG of hashish in the Gulf.

And now to the future

This is the important bit:

Let me explain why, through my second message

- **The UK's response to the IOR is enduring and already meets tomorrow's needs.**

Where others are narrowing their focus, perhaps re-focusing to hard power, we are widening ours.

And I think this is our point of difference.

In addition to our hard and soft power, we are developing our policy, capacity and capability to meet evolving challenges that demand a pioneering response.

These challenges are technical, political, economic and human.

Examples of our future focus:

- In January 2019, we published Maritime 2050: Navigating the Future, which sets out a long term vision for the UK's maritime sector. It covers a broad base; promoting the transition to zero emission and autonomous shipping, safety and security – an important working group in IORA, and supporting the maritime tourism industry – something the Indian government I believe is looking at for the Andamans.
- In March 2019 we will launch our International Ocean Strategy to drive forward international cooperation to improve our collective understanding of the ocean; to develop global standards and rules that support conservation and sustainable management of the ocean; while allowing for new and existing sustainable industries to flourish and to uphold the established law of the sea.
 - Within this there is a goal to put more effort in to the UN, particularly UN SDG 14 'life below the sea'. The UK with partners is looking at what more we can do to deliver on this commitment.

- So we're constantly evolving our strategies and partnerships to do more and do it better – the Commonwealth Blue Charter is another example.

In January Mark Sedwill, the UK's National Security Adviser emphasised at Raisina that the UK would seek more partnerships across the region.

Our engagement today is part of that process.

The second part of this message is that **activities are already underway**. Again let me illustrate

In terms of the MILITARY:

- On 11 Feb, The Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson announced at RUSI in London, that HMS Queen Elizabeth's first operational mission will include the Mediterranean, Middle East and the Pacific. She will have British and American F35s embedded in her air wing, enhancing the reach and lethality of our forces.
- He also announced that two new Littoral Strike Groups are to be created. Complete with escorts, support vessels and helicopters, one would be based East of Suez in the Indo-Pacific and one based in the Mediterranean, Atlantic and Baltic.
- 2018 saw a very public return of the Royal Navy to the Indo-Pacific region. HMS Dragon completed exercise KONKAN with the Indian Navy off Goa. The deployments of the frigate HMS SUTHERLAND,

which also went to Australia, the LPD HMS ALBION and her embarked Royal Marines, were followed by the frigate HMS ARGYLL and today HMS MONTROSE is in the SCS region. HMS Dragon incidentally only 5 days ago completed her 5th successful counter narcotics seizure in the region.

- Our Royal Navy is deployed 365 days a year and continues to support operations, from the enforcement of UN Security Council resolutions against the DPRK, to exercising in wider defence engagement globally.
- Our Joint Action Force 2025 will have a bigger presence in the IOR. It will include 2 Queen Elizabeth Aircraft Carriers – the largest war ships ever built by the Royal Navy, a Maritime Task Force group, 3 logistic ships and 4 tankers, Type 45 destroyers, Type 23 Frigates, Astute class subs, countermining vessels, Type 26 Global Combat ships and off shore patrols. Our recent capability upgrades are the largest in living memory.
- It's all about keeping the ocean safe, free, open, and prosperous. We have just confirmed our support to India's new Information Fusion Centre which I attended the launch of in December. Within the IFC we know that not only can we share information better but we can also be more involved in capacity building with India and others to meet the overall aims of the IFC.
- The UK is a world leader in establishing effective MDA systems such as the Royal Navy's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operation (UKMTO) based in Dubai. The UK has used this expertise to support

regional Maritime Domain Awareness initiatives in the Indian Ocean Region and has served the West Indian Ocean since the early 2000s, is the global model for a 'see and avoid' information and advice service to shipping, and provides the primary point of contact for merchant vessels (regardless of flag) in case of distress. This service is frequently used by ships of all nationality, irrespective of Flag State, including many which are Indian flagged.

- The UK also supported the establishment of the Regional Fusion Law Enforcement Centre - Safety, and Security at Sea (REFLECS-3) in the Seychelles in 2013 and has now developed into the Regional Centre for Operational Coordination (RCOC) in the Seychelles operating alongside its sister centre, the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar. Both have received support and guidance from UK MDA specialists.

and now to our real point of difference -

- **The environment and prosperity are central to our futures, which is why the UK will put more focus on sustainable management.**
- On the environment, we showed leadership at the Commonwealth Heads of State Meeting in April last year, as Chair, when states signed up to new initiatives such as the Blue Charter, Ocean Alliance, and Plastic programmes to help the health of our oceans for the next generation.

- At the Commonwealth Summit, my Prime Minister announced the UK's commitment to tackle plastic pollution in the seas. This included a £60m Official Development Assistance (ODA) support package for Commonwealth countries to drive research and innovation, to improve waste management and reduce avoidable plastic.
- Together at CHOGM we committed to tackle the marine plastic pollution challenge – India agreed to become a founding member of CW Marine Plastics Research and Innovation alongside UK and Canada. We're in it together.
- Linked to this commitment, earlier this month, India and UK scientists formally began to explore the socio-economic impact of marine litter through a workshop in Delhi. This is part of a consultative process that has identified coastal resilience, marine diversity, marine pollution and marine autonomous systems. It overlaps with our 2018 commitment to work together on oceans – confirmed by both countries Science Ministers.

But the environment and prosperity cannot be divorced from tech and science - and this is what I think holds huge potential.

- Our tech and science credentials are deployed in the maritime space, where the UK is working to ensure sustainable marine management for the benefit of all – we are looking into biodiversity, hydrocarbons and deep sea mining.

- Like India, the Blue Economy is increasingly important to us and we are now looking at building capabilities overseas. Here are 3 examples:
 - **BHC Pretoria** recently completed a project looking at Innovative Ocean financing to develop blue economies in Southern Africa. They focused on 6 countries Angola, Namibia, South Africa and Madagascar, Mauritius and Mozambique and identified blue economy sectors that would attract private sector investment. Marine aquaculture was identified as the highest potential sector across three of those countries. We next hope to establish mechanisms to support private sector companies to collaborate with prioritised projects in the Blue Economy with roles for women a priority focus.
 - **BHC Seychelles** supports a wide range of Blue Economy work, including:
 - Supporting Nekton Mission II. Oxford Deep Ocean Research Institute, in collaboration with Oxford University and countries of the Indian Ocean, will explore the deep-sea of the Indian Ocean, culminating in a State of the Indian Ocean Conference in Oxford in 2022. The mission starts in Seychelles and will research around Madagascar, Mauritius, Maldives, Andaman and Sumatra. Using British science, tech and innovation the mission will gather data needed to implement Blue/Ocean Economy policies. The mission will identify countless new species, and measure temperature and chemical balance to understand the health of the ocean and possible impacts of climate change and pollution on it.

- **BHC New Delhi** has started work with the FICCI Task Force on Blue Economy. We will share best practise on policy frameworks, institutional structures, and Marine Spatial Planning.

Other partnerships

It is not just India with whom we integrate our activity and collaborate. It is India's friends, for example Japan, Australia, and the US.

Let me use the latest State Visit to the UK of PM Abe in December to illustrate this

- Our maritime relationship with Japan is the strongest it has been since the Anglo-Japan Alliance.
- There has been a rise in the number of naval deployments to Japan: four RN ships in the last 12 months, with ambition to do more. They conducted bilateral exercises with other partners en route.
- PM Abe's visit underlined a commitment to strengthen our partnership on joint maritime security capacity building in 3rd countries in the Indo-Pacific. These include Sri Lanka, Kenya, Indonesia, Philippines; with whom India has important maritime links too.
- We will also have closer collaboration with Japan on Maritime Domain Awareness.

- By harnessing our respective strengths we are delivering more together. Japan is often mentioned for its ability to connect. The UK via DFID directly supports energy and transport connectivity in Asia. With our partners this has leveraged an additional \$3Bn of financing for regional infrastructure, reducing border transit times by 30% and creating an additional 1935MW of cross border transmission capacity. Our activities will now extend to improving maritime co-operation between India, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Burma and Sri Lanka focused on upgrading ports and the development of multi-modal hinterland logistics infrastructure.

BREXIT and our IOR footprint

Post Brexit we will follow an independent foreign policy and increase our engagement in this region. Minister Field, our Foreign Office Minister for Asia and the Pacific, explained why in a speech he made on the importance of a Free and Open Indo Pacific in Jakarta last year where he emphasised ASEAN centrality in a maritime context.

Our exit from the EU means a greater footprint not a lesser one. The FS recently announced another 10 posts globally will be opened. This includes the Maldives and Djibouti. This means we're present in all the littoral states bar the Comoros.

So to conclude let me refer once more to the Defence Secretary's speech

- The world is changing so rapidly it is up to us to seize the opportunities that Brexit brings. We will build new alliances,

rekindle old ones and most importantly make it clear that we are the country that will act when required.

- Our armed forces represent the best of Global Britain, taking action alongside our friends and allies. Action to strengthen the hand of fragile nations and to support those who face natural disasters. Action to oppose those who flout international law. Action to shore up the global system of rules and standards on which our security and our prosperity depends.
- Our people are already acting around the world from the North Sea to the South Pacific to protect our interests and we already benefit from strong international partnerships.
- So, as well as our relationships with Europe, we need to build on our established relationship with the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada as part of the Five Eyes. With Singapore and Malaysia in the Five Powers Defence Arrangement. With other ASEAN nations, with Japan, the Republic of Korea and India. With our partners in the Middle East, and with our many friends in Africa – from Nigeria in the West to Kenya in the East.
- And we are seeking to use our global capabilities to strengthen our global presence.

In Delhi I like to call our work with India a FORCE FOR GOOD FOR A COMMON GOOD or like PM Modi has coined the phrase, SAGAR. All boats must rise with the tide.

I look forward to the panel debating how we can best do this.

Speech by Sir Dominic Asquith, British High Commissioner to India