

Trafalgar Night Speech Royal Navy Club

October 10, 2013

- It is a unique honor and distinct pleasure to be here this evening. I hardly need say that you are a very distinguished and historic organization. Actually had the pleasure of attending a Trafalgar Night dinner hosted by the Royal Navy Club once before, in the 1990s; the Princess Royal was the guest of honor. Any of you who attended that dinner will acknowledge, I think, that it was a remarkable evening.
- As an American, I am quite honored to be asked to speak tonight. For that I give you special thanks, and also give thanks to the gods of war that the majority of Lord Nelson's career and certainly his glory years were not spent conducting operations in North American waters. It would be much more difficult for me to stand here and provide remarks extolling Admiral Sir George Cockburn, whose incendiary exploits 199 years ago temporarily altered the appearance of my nation's capital city. And, I might add, that Horatio Nelson is one of my personal heroes so it is particularly appealing to be here in this role
- The annual commemoration of the Battle of Trafalgar provides, of course, an opportunity to honor the memory of a man who was, odds on, the greatest naval officer of all time. It is right and proper that we do this, for by honoring the past we recall for current and future generations the great acts of courage and dedication which our nations' soldiers and sailors have performed so that we might be here today, enjoying good food, and good wine, and good company whilst living in the world's greatest democracies.
- But it also affords us an opportunity to consider the times in which we live, and to consider them *in light of Nelson's world*.
 - Set aside the vast differences in technology between 1805 and 2013.
- Consider the international environment of 1805 in a broad context.
 - Terrorists, called pirates, (although without WMD) stalked innocent victims on the high seas.
 - Relations among nations were dominated by the Westphalian nation-state system (although some of the states were being assaulted from within by sub-national groups), and a fair number of the major powers viewed the other major powers with hostility.
 - And the bulk of the world's commerce moved by sea.
 - *Sound familiar?*

- Despite our two nations' twelve year focus on fighting terrorism with large ground force formations, London and Washington are both realigning their national security policies to address more traditional threats. Please do not misunderstand: sadly the terrorist threat will remain, to be dealt with both abroad and unfortunately even at home, but the day of investing in large ground formations to attempt the impossible, to cut off terrorism at its sources, is largely over. But the so-called "war on terror" served to obscure the re-emergence, thanks to anti-democratic, repressive and belligerent regimes in Moscow and Beijing and Pyongyang, of the more traditional kind of nation state threats to our vital interests and to those of our allies. And the bulk of the world's commerce, including absolutely vital energy supplies, still flows by sea. It is a world Nelson would have recognized. And, as in his day, the first line of defense for the United Kingdom and for the United States will be the maritime one.
- Now Horatio Nelson never saw a submarine, let alone a nuclear submarine. It's not clear he even knew about the first modern wartime use of a submarine, the attempted attacks in 1776 by David Bushnell's *Turtle* against ships of the Royal Navy blockading New York harbor. (The attack failed, by the way.) But it is pretty clear that Nelson, a master strategist and master tactician, would have immediately appreciated the vast capabilities which nuclear submarines embody. He understood the need for fast ships to obtain vital intelligence. He understood the need for stealth. And he understood the need to be able to project firepower effectively against land targets. It goes without saying that this applies equally to aircraft carriers – the ability to bring a sovereign and sustainable base of immense power projection proximate to an enemy's shores. And destroyers and frigates? Nelson believed he never had enough of his equivalents of these, so great was his understanding of their value.
- As in Nelson's time, the British Government will, in this and coming decades, need to protect the sea lanes, maintain and project influence, prevent war and deter aggression, and, if necessary, fight decisively. The Royal Navy today, and even more so the Royal Navy of the future, has an enormous national and global role to play. Is the Navy large enough? Well, Nelson never thought he had a sufficient number of ships. But he got the job done! Will the Navy of the 2020's and beyond be smaller than the Navy of the latter part of the 20th Century? Of course, but the ships of today and tomorrow are so much more capable than their predecessors that the situation is similar to a hundred years ago when the small but growing number of Dreadnoughts quickly made obsolete the ships of the Victorian Navy and rendered their much larger numbers almost irrelevant. Astutes, Type

45s, Queen Elizabeth and Prince of Wales, the Assault ships and their Royal Marine complements, the Type 23s and before too long the Type 26s, are and will be immensely capable. And, in many respects, those capabilities will offset their smaller numbers. That said, it remains for this British government, and its successors, to remain true to the projected build plans and force structure and to sustain the First Sea Lord and his team as they manage the present and build to the future.

- As we consider Nelson's world and our own, I would note that Nelson understood that his principal task was to defend the British homeland, and, as circumstances dictated, the homelands of Britain's allies. This, in our world today-- where nuclear weapons will continue to play a role in international affairs for the foreseeable future -- goes directly to the need to maintain a nuclear deterrent, on CASD and to replace the Vanguards with a Successor SSBN. The recently completed Trident Alternatives Review concluded that the Trident-based SSBN on CASD provided the UK the most effective deterrent for the least cost. The idea that CASD should be broken is completely unsound. I think it is safe to say that Nelson, were he alive today, would have agreed.
- Let's be clear: halting CASD *will not*:
 - Cause the Russian government to change its policy of placing nuclear weapons at the heart of its security policy, threatening its near neighbors with nuclear strikes, or carrying out a massive modernization of its ICBM force, SSBN force or bomber force.
 - Cause the Chinese government to halt its programs of building and deploying two new types of ICBMs, a new SLBM, and a new class of SSBNs;
 - Cause the French government to halt deploying its SSBNs in a CASD posture, or, according to the new nuclear deterrence policy signed out this past summer by President Obama, halt the United States from doing so either;
 - Halt the Indian, Pakistani, Israeli or North Korean programs to modernize and expand their nuclear forces;
 - Diminish Iran's desire to develop a nuclear weapons capability; or
 - Alleviate the strain on the MoD's budget for a long time, since building the two SSBNs all parties agree upon has to commence in 2015 given the aging problems found in the existing Vanguard fleet; any relief from not building boats number 3 and 4 will occur outside the next two Parliaments, ie 2025.
- Halting CASD *will* however:

- Undercut the ability of future British governments to manage and de-escalate a crisis with a nuclear armed adversary, because, despite the huge resources we have invested in intelligence we have an extremely poor record in predicting when a crisis will break out
- Create an opportunity for an aggressor to neutralize the UK deterrent by bottling it up in the Clyde by placing mines. Given the geography of the Faslane base, this is a relatively simple thing to do.
- Inevitably, over time, undercut the readiness of the SSBN's crews thereby endangering safe operations
- Finally, it will raise doubts on my side of the ocean about the continued commitment of the British government to share the burden of maintaining a nuclear umbrella over NATO. Despite the anonymous and decidedly incorrect remark made to the New York Times this past April by some unnamed US official that the USG believed the UK should abandon its nuclear deterrent, serious minded and responsible American policy makers appreciate and support the role the British nuclear deterrent plays....and indeed Secretary Hagel quickly dismissed the NY Times report as inaccurate and wrong.
- To summarize with respect to ending CASD, no good will come of such a policy change and some seriously bad things will certainly result and other worse things become plausible.
- Let me begin to wrap up by highlighting one more of Lord Nelson's well-known innovations and extend that to today as well. You, far better than I, understand and appreciate the Nelsonian notion of the "Band of Brothers". ... the creation of a strong bond of trust and which, when extended into the operational realm, permitted and encouraged brother officers to act independently towards a common purpose. Let me suggest to you today that what we call "the Special Relationship" embodies and carries forward that Nelsonian principle.
 - The seven decades which followed World War II have seen three or perhaps four generations of Brits and Americans working together to ensure the mutual protection of our freedoms.
 - Intelligence analysts and operators; soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines; civil servants and officials; scientists; sometimes even diplomats....although I am not sure I want to go there....!
 - We have created a web of interaction and relationships which have served both Britain's interests and America's interests extraordinarily well. It is absolutely unique, involving combined work literally at every level of security classification and military operations. *It is vital.*

- As among Nelson's captains, there have been a few disagreements here and there; but these have been few and far between and do not detract from the enormous and irreplaceable value of our special tie. And, regardless of what the popular press may focus on, *this* is the real "Special Relationship", not whether the Prime Minister and the President are best friends or exchanged gifts which are judged "appropriate" (or not).
- The "Special Relationship" is a sacred trust, however. It was handed to us by our predecessors in office, and it is our task to inculcate the next generation and to hand it to them intact (and, where and when necessary, to bark at them from the sidelines of retirement if they get parts of it wrong).
- Mr. President, I believe I have gone on long enough and that the time has come for me to haul down my flag.
- Members of the Club and their guests: I hope that at least some of my remarks have been of interest to you and I thank you again for the honor of being asked to present them.