

RUSI Sea Power Digital Conference: Transforming Maritime Forces for an Age of Persistent Competition

25 February 2021

It now verges on a truism to note that the future operating environment will be characterised by persistent competition. The distinction between peacetime and war is increasingly blurred as nations' strategic and operational concepts come to encompass the full spectrum of competitive measures. This conference will seek to examine the ways by which naval force structures, postures and concepts of operations will need to adjust to a strategic context in which husbanding forces for high intensity clashes will no longer suffice. The conference will attempt to shed light on how maritime forces can simultaneously deliver persistent effects in the context of limited competition, whilst retaining the capacity to engage in limited warfighting at higher levels of intensity.

1215 - 1230 **Opening Remarks**

Speaker: **Professor Peter Roberts**, Director Military Sciences, RUSI

1230 – 1300 **Keynote**

Chair: **Professor Peter Roberts**, Director Military Sciences, RUSI

Speakers: **Vice Admiral Jerry Kyd CBE**, Fleet Commander, Royal Navy

1300 - 1400 **Session One: Adversary Concepts for Competition and Limited War at Sea**

Across the world, peer and sub-peer competitors are reconceptualising conflict. Rather than being a discrete phase of operations, short sharp periods of high intensity conflict are expected to interrupt periods of persistent lower intensity competition, before both sides disengage and return to competition. Whether one examines the Chinese concept of local war or Russia's approach to escalation management, the underlying belief that conflict is likely to be a persistent but limited feature of interstate relations and that escalation is eminently manageable permeates adversary approaches to competition. This panel will examine the evolution in the strategic thinking of key competitors, and ways it will impact the maritime operating environment.

Chair: **Veerle Nouwens**, Research Fellow International Security Studies, RUSI

Speakers: **Michael Kofman**, Senior Research Scientist, CNA

Professor James Holmes, Associate Professor of Strategy, US Naval War College - '**Home Team vs. Home Team in the Western Pacific**'

Professor Anthony Cordesman, Arleigh Burke Chair, CSIS - '**The Real-World Challenges of "Naval" Joint All Domain Operations**'

1400 - 1500 **Session Two: Every Ship a Station? The Integration of Maritime Forces into Inter-Organizational Efforts in the Competitive Space**

As they seek to deliver effects across the spectrum of competition, naval and amphibious forces will interact with a variety of persistently-engaged assets from across the joint force and across government. How can navies deliver value to entities such as special forces and organizations which hold strategic assets, as well as leveraging the capabilities of these entities to create a persistently-engaged joint force that is more than the sum of its parts? What lessons can be learned from the experiences of other forces with regards to this process of integration?

Chair: **Paul O'Neill**, Senior Research Fellow, RUSI

Speakers: **Linda Robinson**, Director, Centre for Middle East Public Policy, Rand – ‘Special Operations Adaptation to Future Warfare’
Colonel Simon Rogers, Commanding Officer 40 Commando, Incoming ACOS Royal Navy Spec-Ops Cell - ‘The Role of Maritime Special Operations’
Professor Nina Kollars, U.S Naval War College – ‘Maritime Cybersecurity Under Great Power Competition: Nobody is Winning’

1500 - 1600 **Session Three: The Contact Layer - Forward Positioned Forces in a Denied Operating Environment**

As the economic and demographic centres of gravity of states cluster in increasingly urbanized littoral areas, these zones will likely assume an outsized strategic significance. However, they will also become ever more difficult to approach in wartime as access is denied by burgeoning anti-access capabilities. Forward-positioned units that can act as a breaching force that is already present within an A2AD bubble as competition escalates to the level of open conflict will, thus, become ever more critical. This new imperative poses a challenge for naval and amphibious forces which will need to transform themselves accordingly. This panel will address the role of a forward-positioned contact layer and its likely composition.

Chair: **Dr Sidharth Kaushal**, Research Fellow Seapower, RUSI

Speakers: **Brigadier Tony Turner**, Deputy Commandant General, Royal Marines

Bryan Clark, Senior Research Fellow, Hudson Institute – ‘Winning Decision Advantage in the Contact Layer’

1600 - 1630 **Break**

1630 - 1745 **Session Four: From Competition to Warfighting and Back at Sea and in the Littorals**

This panel will address the phase of competition which involves high intensity warfighting. It will address the ways by which maritime forces can posture themselves to shift from competition to warfighting and back with agility. The panel will also examine what operating environment at sea and in the littorals will look like in tactical and technological terms.

Chair: **Justin Bronk**, Research Fellow Airpower, RUSI

Speaker: **Lt. Colonel Dr Frank Hoffman**, Senior Associate Fellow, RUSI - ‘Prelude to War: Gray Zone Operations at Sea’

Colonel Dr Thomas Hammes, Distinguished Fellow, INSS - ‘Strategy driven posture’

Vice Admiral Yoji Koda (Ret’d), JMSDF - ‘A Forgotten Domain in Future High-end War’

Rear Admiral Dr Chris Parry CBE PhD, Senior Associate Fellow, RUSI – ‘Warfighting at Sea: Are You Serious?’

1745 - 1800 **Closing Remarks**

Professor Peter Roberts, Director Military Sciences, RUSI