



Type 26: A Global Role for the Global Combat Ship?

Dr Lee Willett asks whether the Royal Navy's next frigate will attract enough export orders to make the whole programme more viable

On 11 October 2010, the last of the UK's *Daring*-class Type 45 destroyers, HMS *Duncan*, was launched at BAE Systems' Govan shipyard. The spectacular event highlighted the ongoing success of the programme, with HMS *Daring* now in-service and her sister ship *Dauntless* having recently conducted a high-profile test of the ships' Sea Viper air defence missile system. Arguably the most capable air defence ships in the world, the hulls also have space and weight provision in their design to add significant capabilities in the future (assuming the requirement and resources exist).

The launch will be the last for some time, with uncertainty persisting over the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) as to just how many destroyers and frigates the Royal Navy will be able to retain, and when any new ships will enter service. With the six Type 45s now all in the water, attention is turning to the UK's Future Surface Combatant programme, now known as the Type 26 Global Combat Ship.

Sharp-eyed observers at RUSI's annual Future Maritime Operations in July 2010 would have noticed that the Type 26 model put on display by BAE Systems bore a striking resemblance to the Type 45, although without the prominent Principal Anti-Air Missile System radar sphere and with an extended and more flexible aft end (including a larger hangar and a well-deck). One key difference between the two ships, however, is that both customer and supplier alike will be striving to ensure that the Type 26 does not cost £1 billion per ship, as the Type 45 has done.

Improving affordability, along with maximising its flexibility, will be vital for the success of the programme on two counts – affording appropriate force levels for the Royal Navy and maximising the programme's exportability overseas. While SDSR is expected to reduce the Royal Navy's surface warship numbers, the MoD has signed a Terms of Business Agreement (ToBA) with BAE Systems based around building one ship per year for an as yet undefined number of years. Assuming, perhaps unwisely, that



The Type 26 frigate will face stiff competition from the Franco/Italian FREMM warships (pictured above). Below: 3D graphic of Type 26 Global Combat Ship

defence spending may be restored to a more even keel in years to come (if the UK's fiscal status becomes more stable), there is always the possibility that the UK could enhance the Type 26 programme as it develops and build more ships than are currently anticipated. Flexibility and affordability will be vital here in building the case to match the UK's global requirements with a larger number of ships.

A global role for the UK

While SDSR may see significant cuts in UK capabilities across the board, the Government does appear at least to recognise that the UK has global responsibilities which it cannot walk away from. Supporting such responsibilities requires a certain force level and, in the Royal Navy's case, a certain number of ships. As the bloody SDSR battles were fought across Whitehall this summer, while at one stage some reports were suggesting that Royal Navy surface ship levels would be cut by one-third or more, *The Times* noted that Prime Minister David Cameron highlighted the need to maintain the Royal Navy's capability in tackling piracy in the Gulf and drug-running in the Caribbean as he made the case for the "more flexible, more adaptable" posture adopted by the National Security Council to underpin SDSR¹.

The Type 26 will be a key platform in delivering such flexibility and adaptability in supporting the UK's global defence and security requirements. The programme is, at this time, progressing well through its concept phase. However, challenges remain for the MoD and industry. To meet such requirements for flexibility in role and effect, the ships will need significant flexibility and adaptability in design and capability. This can in turn, however, risk cost increase in design, build and through life phases. This creates a significant challenge for the MoD and the defence industrial complex in delivering platforms sufficient in both capability and number at a time when the public and political debate about warship costs is very emotive.

Balancing the Type 26's force level and capability mix will be especially important, given that ship classes in the programme will be in service



beyond 2070. The in-built flexibility and adaptability will need to allow the platform to be upgraded with technology and to adapt to shifts in the strategic landscape. At a time of constrained financial circumstances, understanding the value that the ships will deliver over time rather than just the cost will be crucial in the programme's success.

Numbers

Such value will be driven in large part by the number of tasks the ships will be able to support. Given the UK's already significant global commitments, and with increasing need for a greater degree of strategic presence in the Indian Ocean and perhaps (in the medium term) the Arctic region, as well as existing commitments in the North and South Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, the workhorses of the fleet that are the surface warships will need to be available in sufficient numbers. Yet despite the clear relevance of a broad and enduring maritime contribution to the UK's strategic defence posture as defined in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review, in the Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox's early speeches as Secretary of State for Defence and in the SDSR's 'adaptable' posture, the number of surface warships has dropped dramatically in the last 12 years.

The Royal Navy needs ships for both high-end and lower-end purposes.



The sixth and final Royal Navy *Daring*-class Type 45 destroyer, HMS *Duncan*, was launched on 11 October 2010

Retaining the capacity to conduct high-end operations remains crucial. Lower-end tasks, such as conflict prevention, are becoming more critical in protecting national and international interests, and require sustained presence which itself mandates sufficient numbers. The challenge is to develop enough ships with enough flexibility to ensure that force levels can support the UK's global interests. Fewer ships mean less flexibility. A ship cannot be in two places at once. Flexibility in capability is one thing, but flexibility as a whole cannot be delivered without enough ships.

A Global Market for the UK

A critical component of balancing the cost equation for the Type 26 programme will be the ability to develop ship variants which are exportable. With a project title – Global Combat Ship – surely intended to increase its global appeal, the Type 26 programme already has a very high profile and very prominent position in the plans of the new UK Government to promote the UK's global export position. Under Prime Minister David Cameron, exporting UK technology is a policy priority which is fundamental in helping the UK rebalance its books. Indeed, Mr Cameron visited India in July in a trip described in the press as one designed to raise the profile of the UK's export opportunities for India². India is, of course, looking at building a significant surface warship fleet. More recently, the UK's Landing Platform Helicopter ship HMS *Ocean* played a principal role in a visit by senior UK Government and industry figures to Brazil, a visit which saw the signing of a defence co-operation agreement between the UK and a Brazilian Government which has significant ambitions for its navy to play a blue-water, out of area³ role. Several other nations, with Australia being one example, will be looking in due course for a high-quality surface warship capability. Again, the flexibility of the programme will be key, as options exist in terms of design, capability and build. The Global Combat Ship, with a core principle of design for export, may be a significant economic asset for the UK here. For the Royal Navy, the more the UK builds hopefully the less the programme will cost as a whole.

FREMM

In terms of exports, of course the UK will face competition. One of the largest competitors is, of course the Franco/Italian *Frégate Multi Mission* or FREMM programme. FREMM was borne out of the aborted UK-France-Italy Common New Generation Frigate programme. With air defence, anti-submarine and surface warfare and land attack options, FREMM exhibits the kind of flexibility in capability which the Type 26 will need to generate – unlike the Type 45, which does not as yet have quite such a broad spectrum of capabilities. The three different variants of FREMM also will have the benefit of some common core capabilities. FREMM has already secured export orders with Morocco and Greece, although the higher profile position in and experience of operating in international task groups may increase the appeal of the UK's Type 26 to some navies. ■

Footnotes

1. Francis Elliott, Deborah Haynes and David Robertson, "One Carrier Set to Sail through Defence Review", *The Times*, 4 October 2010, p10.
2. See BBC. "David Cameron Launches Indian Trade Drive", 28 July 2010. Available online at: www.bbc.co.uk/newsuk-politics-10784317. Accessed 28 July 2010.
3. See MoD. "Defence Minister signs Co-operation Treaty with Brazil", 17 September 2010. Available on-line at: www.mod.uk/defenceinternet/defencenews/defencepolicyandbusinessdefenceministersignscooperation-treatywithbrazil.htm. Accessed 13 October 2010. On the Type 26 in particular, Minister for International Security Strategy Gerald Howarth MP – who signed the agreement on board HMS *Ocean* – stated that the design of the Type 26 ships "brings with it a tremendous opportunity for co-operation with Brazil through partnering, rather than simply through a customer-supplier relationship".