

What do we do on the 24th of June? What should be the first tasks of Her Majesty's Government when the Prime Minister walks in front of the Press early on that morning when the result of EU referendum is announced? asks Capt BS Forethought

Whatever the result what we can be sure of is whatever the result the political oxygen is going to be absorbed with candidates positioning themselves for the upcoming Leadership election. However, I am not going to discuss here the differences between the outcomes of the respective votes, both campaigns are covering this with gusto. What I mean to discuss on the next page is what is true however we vote.

So let us imagine we are there sitting in the Cabinet on that Friday morning, what should we recommend, how do we make the best of the situation? If in every disaster there is opportunity, and to whatever the result one side is going to think it is a disaster, what is that opportunity? My suggestion is that the first order of Government should be a massive ship-building programme to rebuild our escort/frigate and SSN fleets.

**Scenario One: Britain Votes Leave:** As soon as the result is declared the first thing which will happen, almost before whichever Dimbleby finishes the word 'leave', every British ambassador in Europe will be beating down the door of their respective Head of Government shouting 'the people have spoken, the bastards'. Every sinew of British Diplomacy will be then stretched to explain how this isn't what the Government, or the Civil Service, or any sane person wants... so let us try and make the best of it.

Of course, in order to prevent further national exits from the European Union, the only politically sane course of action on the part of the Commission will be an attempt to 'punish' the UK. Even under WTO rules, there is plenty of scope for a market to make life difficult for a smaller neighbour. In fact it is the very fear of this is what Remain campaign are focussing on. This will impose a 21st century redux of the 'continental system'. With pressure on the Pound as the ECB dumps its reserves on the market, interest rates will rise, house prices fall, and to prevent the economy spiralling out of control we will require a stimulus to break the vicious cycle.

Just as with its various forebears across the centuries the result of this was the UK being forced into switching its posture to a wider world focus. Therefore our key trading relationships will switch away from the continental landmass and the only way to get there is over the sea. So whoever ends up becoming Prime Minister in the wake of David Cameron's resignation will be forced, whether they like it or not, into massively increasing our maritime presence in order to secure our lines of communication. A ship building programme kills two birds with one stone, stimulating the economy, whilst securing our overseas trade.

**Scenario Two: Britain Votes Stay:** In this case then if Britain is to avoid the fate of France and in effect becoming a German client, it is going to have to develop some unique negotiating chip to bring to the table in European negotiations. Whatever ones euro-view, the behaviour of the Troika with Greece, Italy and Spain, should send shivers down the spine of democrats. Whether or not Yanis Varoufakis was threatened with casus belli for attempting to circulate the deliberations of the Eurogroup, he is right there is now a very real risk of a fault line running through Europe down the Rhine and the Danube splitting the unemployed 'Latins' from the rich 'Teutons'. If we vote in, Britain's vocation in Europe will be to keep the peace between these two factions. To do so we are going to have to develop leverage over both sides.

Given the Northern Powerhouse is not going to rival the Rhineland for several decades, it is not going to be industrial leverage; as German banks have successfully kyboshed the completion of a single market in services, it will not be financial leverage; just as the Euro is really a 'Grossdeutschmark', so any "EU Army" will really be a 'Wehrmacht (+)', so it will not be an Air-Land leverage; and although cultural dominance is powerful in shaping agendas, it is poor at forcing decisions. So what is it we have which the Germans do not? The answer is of course the same as it has been for five centuries - Naval power.

Unconsciously we have already been doing this. The UK maintains a full spectrum of capability precisely because it has, at least the possibility, that were more resources to be made available in the event of a more general war, then Britain could operate independently. We have effectively sacrificed operationally available mass now to maintain operational independence in the future.

A Remain vote would redouble this imperative.

William Hague once said that "Europe used to be run on a Franco-German axis, now it is more of a German-German axis." The reason for this was pointed out in Alesina and Spolaore's *The Size of Nations*, public goods disproportionately benefit those close to their Centre of Gravity. The Centre of Gravity of European Air-Land environment is the Rhine, it has the country, manpower, industry, and movement corridors. Whereas the Centre of Gravity of the Maritime world is the Channel, it has the sea-lanes, the ports, the industry, and the financial services.

So when the recent McKinsey report on military productivity asserted that "we must pool and share military capabilities in a much more substantial fashion" we should be wary, as the notion of pooled defence capability is already well developed in Air-Land sector but not in the Maritime one. A development profoundly against our national interest as its Centre of Gravity will be on the Rhine, not the Channel.

BAOR was the cold war solution to this dilemma. Dominate the Centre of Gravity by occupying it. However, BAOR was expensive, inflexible, isolated, and politically we could not again build it to genuinely significant strength. Rather, the Army operates at its best when fulfilling its historic role, as a giant bullet fired by the Royal Navy (and its prodigal son the "Royal Air Navy"). Able to strike at a place of our choosing, at a time of our choosing, with the strategic depth afforded by seaward passage. Remember, it is the hunter who chooses the hunting ground.

## **The Maritime Pivot**

Whether through a Democratic Asian Pivot, or a Trumpian Isolationism, the Pax Americana which has lain over Europe for two generations is coming to an end.

For the reasons I outlined above, whether we like it or not we are an island, therefore Britain will always be the Athens to the continental Sparta; the United Provinces to Ancient Regime France; the Barcian Carthage to Fabian Rome. Yet after our entanglements in Afghanistan and Iraq we have invested in our Air-Land capability, at the cost of systematically gutting our maritime infrastructure. Our SSN (now 8) and frigate and destroyer (now 19 - scarcely more than our losses at Jutland) fleets especially have been decimated, the very capabilities which are the most important for maintaining persistent overseas presence.

Just as the United States is in the middle of its Asian Pivot, so Britain should engage in its own Maritime Pivot.

In the event of a Brexit recession (or for that a Remain euro-collapse recession), we will need to stimulate the economy, and what better way than a sustained shipbuilding programme. As modern ships are as advanced as fighter jets, such a programme would stimulate our shipbuilding, high tech engineering, and R&D sectors whilst providing skilled employment, both uniformed and not, overwhelmingly north of the Watford Gap. Astute submarines and Type 45 destroyers are nearing the end of their current order cycles, so extra ones could be rapidly commenced and cost effectively built, enabling us to have two carrier groups in operation much of the time - one as carrier strike, the other in an amphibious role. The UK-built Wave class auxiliaries and the South Korea-built Tide class, as well as Batch 2 stretched River class counter-terrorism, counter-piracy and anti-smuggling ships (which are also capable of deployment to the South Atlantic) could also give shipbuilding opportunities to English and Scottish yards, building to proven designs with benefits of scale - and of course more lower-cost hulls in the water.

A renewed focus on this form of independent expeditionary capability has significant upsides in that is highly flexible; the same piece of infrastructure can be used for a counter stroke in the Baltics, or in the Black Sea, or in the South Atlantic, or the South China Sea, or the Gulf, or in Home defence; it keeps our lines of communications open; it can intervene quickly to conduct evacuations and humanitarian relief; and it means when people the world over look to sea they see a ship flying the White Ensign. Maintaining a Maritime predominance over our EU 'partners' does not come at the expense of our ability to deter Russian aggression, or intervene with the Islamic reformation, rather it enhances it.

What I am not arguing for is emphatically not an extension of the 'penny more for the Army is a penny less for the Navy' mentality. As a soldier I have no institutional loyalty to the Royal Navy. Whatever the engagement we are still going to need tanks, Special Forces, infantrymen, drones, and fighter jets. It is despite of my institutional loyalty rather than because of it I recommend this course of action. It is the cold logic of Realpolitik which means on June 24th, however the vote, however we see ourselves, and whoever in No 10, the strategic situation is the same; our future lies at sea.