**Transcript of First Sea Lord Podcast Pt 2, 9 March 2020**

[00:19:14] Hello and welcome to part two of our special three part podcast series with Admiral Tony Radakin, First Sea Lord, Chief of the Naval Staff and the professional head of the Royal Navy. In part one, Admiral Radakin talked to us about his tenure so far as First Sea Lord and gave us some of his thoughts and opinions on the matter of leadership.

[00:19:39] In this part, we delve more deeply into the Naval transformation program. And in part three Admiral Radakin will answer your questions as posed to him via Twitter.

[00:19:53]Sir can you talk to me a little about your particular transformation approach and outline the future of the Royal Navy?

[00:20:04] **First Sea Lord:** [00:20:04] I want to set out where we are. Where are we going to focus some of the things that we're going to do and get after, and then where we see that we can get after them quickly and early, do it straight away.

[00:20:20] Part of my time as Second Sea Lord and I spent a lot of time in this sort of joint and centre areas of Defence and I came from being Chief of Staff of, as it was then, Joint Forces Command back to the Navy and a Navy that's doing really well and is being invested in and is being recapitalised, but the sense that we could do even better is one of the driving elements for me, but I also observed that we had an inertia and the inertia has to be overcome and we have a cautiousness about change and we have a cautiousness about how we might go about things, and therefore our transformation approach tries to overcome some of that caution and tries to instill a confidence and agility, a willingness to take risks, and just a willingness to change. And the reason why I think that is so important is that we're in the midst of a technological revolution, we have some strategic challenges out there, we are being tested.

[00:21:40] The shift with us leaving the EU, and what does that mean to continue to be an international player in the world? And how do we put meaning to that? And does that then flow into global Britain? And therefore we have to respond to some of those challenges? And we should do it in a way that is not reluctant. We should do it in a way that is confident, is what really good organisations do. They shift with their strategic context and then they do it in an exciting and opportunistic way. And. To get back to your original point. That's why I'm wary of the enormous plan and what has felt to me like sometimes the way that we go about our business is map it all out,have a working group, have a pilot, have another study, review it, and my wariness and it may be exaggerated by the position I'm in, is that if public sector organisations are maybe slower to change than some equivalent private organisations. And if that's even truer for uniform services. Then the danger is, is that you get timed out with the change that you want to make.

[00:23:02] So I think we are deliberately trying to go at this quickly. It's not just me, it's the Fleet Commander and Second Sea Lord too. We're trying to lead on Navy. We're fortunate that the three of us started together, so we have a thousand day approach. And I think I'm very fortunate that I had just over a year, as Second Sea Lord so I could think about some of these things and then that meant that in my second week I was then laying out right this is where we're going to go, this is what we want to do.

[00:23:39] And I laid that out to the senior. part of the organization at a First Sea Lord conference. And then on the following day, I laid it out to 300 of our warrant officers, and then in the third week, me, Second Sea Lord and Fleet Commander went around the Navy to try to say, right, this is what we're going to do.

[00:24:03] Now, one element that might sound really arrogant, but when I looked back. I think that was really important because the danger is, is if you, if you say, right I'm going to stay in post I'm going to assimilate I'm going to take a year to understand and then see what we're going to do, at best, you've got two years and it takes a long time to try to energise and try to understand right even if you think you got a plan, well actually what might be some of the pitfalls with that plan.

[00:24:38] And then how are you going to get it going? So my piece on this is I've, I think I've learnt about this is the amount of energy you need in order to try to shift your organisation and to do it in a way that hopefully excites the organisation, so it can actually get after what you're trying to achieve because you're not just going to order it from the top.

[00:25:03]The whole technique is about setting goals and then getting after those goals, but also having the humility and confidence where those goals might be a bit too bold and we would be better by either reversing out of it or just taking a bit more time to achieve it .That's how we're approaching in technique terms some of our transformation plans.

[00:25:28]**Nick:** [00:25:28] It's certainly busy down on , the sort of worker bee level. I've heard transformation described as like spinning plates whilst juggling

[00:25:34] How does it feel, at your end of the spectrum? Is it all going to plan. And, you've talked a lot about this dynamism that, that you and the other senior officers of the Navy bringing to transformation, compared to previous transformations, which I'm sure we've all suffered and enjoyed and which have obviously failed. Which is why we're here as we are now. What does good light look like? Say we're one, two, three years down the road. What, what does that the post Radakin transformation Navy look like?

[00:26:10] **First Sea Lord:** [00:26:10] So I don't think, just to in your introduction there to, to, to, to this question, but I don't think the other transformations have, have been unsuccessful they've moved the organization on and that and that.

[00:26:20] This gets to my, I want us . In general terms, to be a much more agile organization, much more receptive about change, constantly changing to adapt to the world that we're in and I get back to in a technological revolution, I think that is absolutely essential. And in a changing world, it's absolutely essential.

[00:26:40] And so at its heart. I want a more confident Navy, a more ambitious Navy, a more agile Navy, one that is much more receptive to technology and innovation. And, and if we can shift the organization that way, the way that we're looking to do that is building on our success. So we're doing well on operations all over the world.

[00:27:07] That's, that gives the Navy a buzz about it We have an added confidence because we're fortunate we're being invested in. So there's a big recapitalization going on for the Navy's. So, and that extends to the Dreadnought class, replacing our Vanguard, SSBNs, two new aircraft carriers and a program that's going better than people envisaged a few years ago, and we get the warm glow that we're a two carrier nation.

[00:27:41] And the only other nations that operate two carriers are American and China. And then we get a further warm glow because we've got two frigate programs type thirty one type twenty six, we've got new support shipping, we've got brand new batch to offshore patrol vessels and all of our aviation inventory's either being refreshed or renewed or getting brand new aircraft, like the F35 so that's a great platform to then try and respond to the strategic context and also respond to an organization where we think that we've got unlocked potential and opportunity to be even better. How do you describe that so that people can follow it? We've settled on five outputs, so to be even stronger in the North Atlantic, because that is such a fundamental for UK Defence, and we must with our allies maintain control of the North Atlantic, and we must ensure that our nuclear submarine, the nuclear deterrent is never found and that the Prime Minister has that confidence in our nuclear deterrent. Secondly, how do we take this substantial investment and make us truly a carrier strike Navy and really wring out the most of that so that we can operate with our allies as carrier navies, such as the French and the Americans. Thirdly, how do we blend technology with these amazing people called Royal Marines? Who have fantastic maritime routes, but they also have that commander ethos, and I described them as being the most entrepreneurial part of the Royal Navy, and so they can sense opportunities, they can, understand that and have the flexibility and the agility to adapt to new techniques, they're good at embracing new technology and it's so how do we use that to move them on as well. The fourth element is what we call forward presence. So in a world where we say there is more competition and where we are going to retain our responsibilities for our Homeland base but actually we need to be out there more than ever. So can we, can we extend our reach into other parts of the world and can be on a permanent presence basis? And we're doing some of that in the Gulf with a new base there. We do that in The Falklands. We're looking to do that in the Caribbean and might we look to do that in other parts of the world, if that's attractive to ministers as part of global Britain. And might, we even envisage that our type 31 Frigates never come back to the UK. And if that was the case, then that takes advantage of some magnificent facilities that, that exist in the Middle East and the India Pacific. But that then drives us to have a different support solution and it drives us to have a different personnel solution.

[00:31:06] And then the fifth thing is technology and innovation. We do some great things with technology and innovation, but how do we embrace it in an even stronger way? So those are the five outputs. We can argue about whether or not, whether or not technology and innovation really is an output. And that then drives some enablers, which are people support, training, infrastructure.

[00:31:30] And we described again, technology and innovation. And that's, that's what we're trying to do. And, and have the, have the ambition, have the courage to say, when we look at our people solutions, have we got the balance right between shore and sea? Have we, have we responded properly to what is being a very clear and articulate refrain from our Sailors and Marines that they want more certainty and stability in their lives.

[00:32:04] And I think we've done some good things, but they've tended to be small things and they haven't solved the problem. So does that mean that we look at this, at this headquarters that we're in and we try to remove some of the processes, some of the hierarchy, some of the conventions. We look again at what size and shape and are we willing to take more risk on our shore footprint? Because if I halve the size of this headquarter and some of the supporting organizations, I can shift that money and people element to be an extra thousand people into the front line. And that then becomes really significant because that then gets after some of the gapping, and that might allow me to keep our ships at distance with a double crewing approach and we get even more out of those ships, which are big capital investments and politicians and the public rightly want to get even more out of what they've invested in. So that's, that's what we're trying to do. And it, and it cuts across all spaces. Last week I announced that we're investing in the world's largest underwater drone, and that's with a company based in Plymouth, and that's 30 metres long, and we'll be in the water in October.

[00:33:27] And then how do we embrace that with our existing investment and what does that mean for the North Atlantic and what does it mean when I look at our partner nations that are investing in similar underwater drones and how might we fight differently? And so it's just being excited and saying that that's going to be an effect, a more effective way to fight in the future and to fulfill our responsibilities and somehow how do we, and that we are excited and we embrace that.

[00:33:57] Not that we go into an anxious mode to say, gosh, what does this mean for our current inventory and what's this going to mean for different people's jobs? I don't think I, I want us to be focused on those outcomes. And that's what we're trying to do with this label, which is a horrible label called transformation cause it's all a bit managerial.

[00:34:20]I prefer the label that it's fulfilling our potential. Can we be even better? And we can, and that means that we go faster. We have a bigger ambition, and we look to get after some of these things. And we have the humility and confidence to say, well, actually, we're doing quite well. We're quite good, but we can be even better. And what does that look like?

[00:34:44]**Nick:** [00:34:44] Do you worry that a lot of your success , for this vision is reliant on things outside of your control as First Sea Lord? The reform of DIO, DE&S and there's the never ending problem of money. Do do you ever get worried beads that despite a coherent Naval vision for a future strategy, someone may come in and pull the rug out from under you?

[00:35:09] **First Sea Lord:** [00:35:09] No, I don't. I was involved with the Levine reviews and so to some extent, this to me feels like the correct Levine approach. That the senior team in the Navy looked to shape the Navy's direction and how we can maximize that, not for our own benefit, for Defence's benefit and for the Nation's benefit.

[00:35:33] And so I think we're being supported by Head Office. I think this is complimentary to a Head Office that also views that Defence has to transform. And I also think it's complimentary to what's happening in the rest of Defence. The Air Force are definitely trying to get after how can they maximize what they provide. I think the Army had some substantial transformation programs in the past. And again, there will be a serious debate about how do we operate and fight in the future. And then you only have to look to Strategy Command and the clarity that we have that we need to go into this thing that we call integrated defence or multi domain approach, where we look to blend the traditional environments of maritime, air and land with the new domains of space and cyber and that, that feels to me that that's an enormous responsibility on STRATCOM to fulfill that because I'm the generation that was part of the Joint era and that was a tough enough journey and we still got further to go. But pointing at somebody in three different types of uniforms and saying what you lot need to work together feels much easier than trying to point at five things and it's hard to point at space and cyber. So I think there's a genuine thrust in Defence that we have to change. I also, if we kind of go into a conceptual piece, the other piece that feels very different from when I joined up was the way that Defence was described as an insurance policy and that we had contingent forces that if we were really, really lucky, might never be used, but they were there ready to go. I think when we analyse that strategic context and this constant competition. And then when I look at the 41 billion that goes into UK defence, I think there's an obligation that modern Armed Forces are going to be used almost all the time, and we are going to be linked with our other partners in the security construct and our intelligence agencies are on operations the whole time. I think Defence is on operations the whole time and there can be even more of that. And that this notion of contingent forces ready to be unpacked or the break glass in an emergency model, I'm less sure about. I think it will exist, but it will be less dominant. So that to me is a big backdrop as to what's happening, and I think what we're doing in the Royal Navy feels complimentary to all of that. Then when you get to the really difficult bits, like have you got enough money and have you got enough authority or are you too reliant on other parts of the organisation and your dependencies?

[00:38:49] The money one, I think there's a real obligation for us to look again and say right how can we do things differently? If we were in a similar sized organisation, I don't think that we would be looking for the instant sort of additional cash handout, you have to look internally in your own organisation, and that might mean that you have to shift and adjust. It might mean that some of your ambitions for new equipment have to be pushed, right. It might mean that you have to look again at your size and structure so that you can optimise the balance for what you've got to do. I think that's true of the Royal Navy, and I think that's true of Defence, and we'll have that big conversation as part of the integrated review.

[00:39:36] But I'm wary of jumping to the, what feels too easy. And I think it's, it's felt to me it's too symptomatic of the way that we've approached this, which is actually of course, government, I can do more and just give me some extra cash and we'll carry on doing everything that we're currently doing and then I'll do the things that I think we need to do.

[00:39:59] The reality is that we might have to make some tough decisions in order to get to the place that we want to get to. And we've done this in the past. We've now got these two magnificent aircraft carriers, but we took a dip where we haven't had them effectively for the last 10 years. If I look at Nimrod, now we can say that it was done to us, but look at where we are now with the introduction of the P-8.

[00:40:27] I look at what we want to do with automation, and that might mean that we will have fewer mine hunters so that I can use the cash from our mine hunting ships and the people to put that into an automated approach, which might be much better, and it's definitely much safer and it's probably far more effective and we can find, find the mines more quickly. None of that will fit together perfectly. There isn't the perfect scarf joint. And so we might have to go down in order to come up. The senior leadership, and this is not just the top three, this is, this is the two stars. This is one stars. This is all way down, can we have, again, the courage and the confidence to say, right, we're going to change the structure of our organisation. We're going to accept that we're going to do things differently and we might have to generate the cash in order to get to a better position. And then the supporting organisations, whether that's the DIO or for us, Abbey Wood DE&S and the submarine delivery agency and the Defense Nuclear Organisation.

[00:41:42] Those are all organisations that are on side with us. The piece that, that we have done in the last three or four months, which we definitely didn't do in my first three or four months, is reach out to those other organisations. And if our transformation is going to be successful, it will only be successful by being blended with those organisations.

[00:42:01] And if I take the organisation that we, that I think sadly we sometimes treat as a bit of a punch bag, if only the DIO was better. Well, again, we've got to be honest about how much has Defence invested in infrastructure over the last 10 and 20 years. And then also be honest about a Defence Infrastructure Organisation whose leadership is willing to be challenged and to buy into there might be different ways of doing things.

[00:42:30] So I think all of that feels good. And then. The final piece, which to me is very strong from having been on the road last week, is this empowerment at a much, much more profound level and an emphasis. So your parent organisation Culdrose, which is an amazing air station, air base. Very busy, one of the busiest in Europe.

[00:42:58] We've got a really strong competent senior team there, and yet the real budget for your boss is about 6 million pounds of which the majority is on travel and subsistence. And then some is in fuel. That is not the way for a senior leader to run that base. And I want to have a conversation as to whether or not he gets the full amount of money and he decides on how many people are there and if he employs less people that he gets that cash and he might then want to invest in the infrastructure issues that are down there, and he might actually and all of this by the way, is is using defence's infrastructure architecture. And he might want a bigger team of civil servants that are down there for both commercial, financial and infrastructure expertise. And that the base and the leadership down there owns their own future. And I think there are other parts of defence that are in that model. I think the Air Force, with the way it runs it's air stations definitely is, we have quite a centralized model for the Navy.

[00:44:06] But that goes again, to my other point about this unlocked potential, I put really good people in charge of important parts of the Royal Navy and they are in command and they're comfortable in command, and yet we don't give them the power, the levers, the authority to do the things that we would want them to do.

[00:44:28] And that to me, that's where this starts to stitch together. It's not about money. It's about having a confidence and courage to do things differently. And there might be some choices around money and there might be some choices around how fast we go and some choices about what we do. But there's, there's lots of choices there that we own.

[00:44:50] And we should, we should be wary of constantly looking. If only I get some more cash than I can do a few more things.

[00:44:57]**Nick:** [00:44:57] Transformation to me seems heavily focused on the structural aspects. Are you concerned that it won't fix or address any cultural issues that are beneath the surface? And do you think the Navy's traditions, culture, ethos, can be maintained? We are an organization that is, is not hamstrung, but, but very anchored to our, our past and our history and our traditions. Do you think we can carry them forward with us into the next 15, 20 years?

[00:45:31] **First Sea Lord:** [00:45:31] So I think you're right about the cultural points, and that's one of the toughest challenges in terms of can we adjust the culture in a positive way to be more comfortable with change, to embrace a bit more risk, particularly where we need , to embrace technology and innovation.

[00:45:48] And you're right, there could be a danger that in an organisation steeped in those magnificent traditions, that it might feel high, but I don't, I don't think that's the way it is. I think if we look carefully at the Navy that we've always been, we have always embraced change and we have always been driven by wanting to have an advantage over our potential enemies.

[00:46:14] And that's what this is all about. And this is about the front line. It's not managerial guf, this is driven by a hard operational edge and we should challenge a culture that might be a little bit too soft in terms of the shore footprint. That might be a little bit soft in terms of putting up with the levels of process nonsense, we should be really aggressive about getting after some of the issues on the front line. If I give you one, one tiny example, we need to get better into balance with increasing the number of people in the Navy. We're at 96- 97%. But you know that we have operational pinch points where we don't have quite the right skills.

[00:47:05] So we might have broadly enough volume, but we don't have the right skills. And that ranges from nuclear watch keepers to intelligence analysts, to chefs where recruiting is up nearly 20% from where it was a year ago because I want to roll out a red carpet for somebody who wants to serve their country, and especially if they want to serve in the Royal Navy, and at times it's felt like people have to have an extraordinary amount of patience to get through our computer system.

[00:47:35] Then we put up a ditch. Because they've got a medical issue, which was maybe valid and, and we have to call it out, but can we do it efficiently and quickly and can we bowl it out if it's not going to be a problem? And then, then if they got over the hurdle, then we put a water ditch in the way. How can we improve our systems to get people in and get them in quickly?

[00:47:58] And we're doing that. So I say, you know, we're recruiting up by nearly 20%. If I look at the chefs' issue, we had a very institutional approach that we would come back into balance. So that phrase, that would mean actually we'd have enough chefs, but it was going to take about 10 years. 2028, we've challenged that, we've had the humility to go back to see anybody who's left the Royal Navy as a chef in the last three or four years, might they want to come back in. That's generated 30 people and they all want to serve at sea because they miss, they miss the craic. They miss the camaraderie. We have changed our plans so that we are still buying into a defence catering college where we'll train all of defence's chefs, but at the same time, we're keeping open our own Navy chef training school at Raleigh rather than closing it down.

[00:48:59] We're looking at how the stewarding branch and changing that because it doesn't feel that we need that particular skill set in the same way that we've needed it in the past. So can we have shared galleys on board ships and do that with our existing ship? We don't have to wait for new ships to do that and then can we offer those stewards a quick route to go down the chef pathway and, and lots of them, nearly 40% have accepted that. That approach has meant that we come into balance with our chefs.

[00:49:36] Instead of it being 2028 we get into balance middle of next year. And that's mirrored with a whole series of operational pinch points. Mostly they get resolved by 2023 and that's at the same time that we're growing as a Navy, as I mentioned, I think for the first time for 70 years. And in tonnage terms, we grow as a Navy between 2015 and 2025 by nearly 30% and we've introduced those two amazing aircraft carriers and we haven't had a big uplift in people.

[00:50:08] That's not about money. That's about being an organisation that is willing to change and look at things differently and challenge some of the conventions and processes and the way that we've been doing things. And that's what we're trying to generate. And I think that is really important for us as Navy. But I also think there are some opportunities, for Defence as a whole, to challenge ourselves about some of the things that we've been sticking with.

[00:50:35]**Nick:** [00:50:35] You mentioned people and unlocking opportunity and that's obviously very timely. What sort of structural changes do you think are essential to, to try and attract more women into, into the Navy.

[00:50:49]**First Sea Lord:** [00:50:49] I don't think it feels like it's structural changes to me.

[00:50:52] I think it may be practices and processes and attitudes, and it's more than women. It's this fundamental of unlocking the potential and can we have a Royal Navy where everybody feels comfortable in serving their country? And being embraced as part of the Royal Navy and fulfilling their own potential because I'm coming to the end of my career and I think I've been incredibly fortunate to have had that enjoyable experience all the way through.

[00:51:25] But also to be comfortable being the person that I am in this great Royal Navy and never having to be somebody else. And so I want that experience to apply to everybody. So it doesn't matter what your gender is, what your ethnic minority, what your race is, what your sexuality is. Everybody feels comfortable to serve in their Royal Navy on behalf of the nation, and we are all focused on people fulfilling their potential, which is part of this bigger goal so that we can be an even better Royal Navy serving our nation. I spoke at the Naval Service Women's Network conference and tried to explain that philosophy. And that might mean that we have to do some things differently. It might mean that we have to be more aware that actually, because it's too much bias towards men at the moment that we might favour male attributes. So the, the robust male leader or the decisive male leader, sometimes those traits are described with women in a less attractive way. And it's unfair. And we've got a call it out. And to help us understand that or does it mean that our promotion panels we have more women as part of the promotion panels so that we can just watch those traits?

[00:53:06] Does it mean that we commit ourselves even more so to try to break through with some of the ethnic minority communities that aren't that well represented and maybe are cautious and don't have the natural affinity with their Royal Navy. And that might involve additional engagement teams. It definitely involves sticking with it and having the patience to make those breakthroughs and then just an innate comfort with who people are as individuals in the organisation.

[00:53:40] And if I'm a white, straight male, and that feels deeply comfortable as an individual in the Royal Navy that that's equally comfortable, whether your gay, male, female, whatever race, whatever religious creed you have, that actually this is the Royal Navy for you, and we're all focused on serving our nation to the best of our ability, and the organisation is looking to fulfill everybody's potential to the best of our ability.

[00:54:16] **Nick:** [00:54:16] And that concludes part two of this special three part podcast with the First Sealord Admiral Tony Radakin. Listen out for part three of the interview next, where we hear him answer questions as submitted by you via Twitter.