

# PORTRAIT: NAVAL FORCES

**We heard about the significance of the high seas back in school. There we learned that oceans cover three quarters of the earth's surface and that phytoplankton in the oceans produce 70 percent of the oxygen so vital to life. Ocean currents influence weather around the globe.**

*By Rudolf Stirnimann, Customer Segment Manager*

More than half of the world's population lives on or near the coast. The ocean directly provides work and nourishment to local residents. There are presumably still immense deposits of oil, natural gas and other coveted raw materials under the ocean floor. According to IMO/UN statistics, 90 percent of world trade is transported by sea. That means the oceans are extremely important regions ecologically and economically, politically and strategically.

## **Mandate of the naval forces**

The naval forces are charged with safeguarding and protecting the interests of a country on the high seas. That ultimately includes defending the country and its citizens within its land and water borders. To ensure that events do not reach that point, the naval mandate today naturally also includes international conflict prevention and crisis management.

---

*Communication channels are crucial to effective international cooperation.*

---

The performance of this mandate is called into question in many places because of limited financial resources. Apart from well-known trouble spots, this is the big issue occupying most armed forces around the globe, naval forces included. Defence budgets are being cut back for political and economic reasons. Those in positions of responsibility are faced with a tough question: How can the required tasks be carried out with fewer resources? In the conflict area around the Horn of Africa, a solution has emerged. A wide variety of countries are collaborating with each other to fight piracy. By collaborating, each individual country can reduce the resources it has to contribute to a bearable level. Nonetheless, the impressive protective fleet operating on site is on a scale that only very few countries could match. One crux of the matter remains, however. In such a large area, it is not just the number of ships that counts but rather their coordinated action.



## **International communications**

The naval forces involved have to cooperate effectively with each other. That is crucial whether the task is to combat piracy or terrorism, or to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction or organised crime. The different communication channels connecting the fleets of the participating nations with each other are certainly prerequisites for doing so, as is a joint and integrated system for monitoring the affected region. These systems convey relevant information from military, paramilitary and civil sources. They process that information and then make it available to all associated units. The goal is to ensure that the international defence units on site obtain information that is as up-to-date, comprehensive and consistent as possible. That way they have a common relevant operational picture and a joint basis for decision-making. With this information, coordination is easier and the required resources can be kept to a minimum.

In the November 2009 issue of Jane's Navy International, Commander Johnny Ley, Commanding Officer, HMS Cornwall said: "The key to the mission in an area covering two million square miles is communication." ■