

# The New Maritime Strategy: Confronting Peer Competitors, Rogue States, and Transnational Insurgents

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by James Kurth

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*Abstract: Established military organizations, such as the U.S. military services, have many things – revered service traditions, stable bureaucratic structures, standard operating procedures, and of course distinctive weapons systems.<sup>1</sup> Ideally, they should also have a coherent military strategy, one which will guide them in how to fight their wars or how to deter these wars from ever happening. The U.S. Navy is now developing a new maritime strategy, its first real strategy since the 1980s. The Maritime Strategy then was directed toward a single enemy, the Soviet Union. The new strategy faces three very different kinds of enemies: peer competitors, rogue states and transnational terrorists. The new strategy will include such familiar concepts as containment and deterrence, but it should be centered upon the concepts of command of the commons and denial.*

## The United States and Maritime Strategy

Ever since its founding in 1776, the United States has had a navy and, indeed, with its early dependence upon ocean commerce, it has always been a maritime nation. However, it has not always had an explicit and coherent naval or, more broadly, maritime strategy. Initially the relatively-secure geography of the United States, and later the overwhelming size of its navy, seemed to make the development of a specific maritime strategy unnecessary. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Navy has had no such

In preparing this article, I benefited greatly from the discussion in the seminar led by Professor Richard J. Norton at the *2007 Current Strategy Forum*, U.S. Naval War College, June 12, 2007.

<sup>1</sup> Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, second edition (New York: Longman, 1999).

strategy in the period since the collapse of the Soviet threat and the end of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup>

But there come times when foreign threats become so pronounced that they convince the leadership of the U.S. maritime forces – the Navy and the Marines – that a maritime strategy is indeed necessary. Japan was obviously such a threat in 1941, and the Pacific War strategy was the result. Another such threat developed in the late 1970s, when it seemed that the U.S. national strategy of nuclear deterrence was being checkmated by the vast Soviet nuclear arsenal and by the growing Soviet quantitative advantage in conventional ground forces. In the early 1980s, the naval leadership – exemplified by the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral James Watkins, and the Secretary of the Navy, John Lehman – responded with the development of the official and systematic “Maritime Strategy,” which was designed to fight and win a global conventional war with the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup>

Now, with the new global threat posed by transnational networks of Islamist terrorists, but also with the newly-nuclear or near-nuclear rogue states of North Korea and Iran, and also with the ambiguous course of the rising power of China, the leadership of the U.S. Navy believes that a new maritime strategy is necessary.

### **The Development of a New Maritime Strategy**

Accordingly, in June 2006 the CNO, Admiral Michael Mullen, announced that the Navy, in cooperation with the Marines and the Coast Guard, would develop this new maritime strategy.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the work of various agencies within the Navy itself, including the Naval War College, the development process has included a “conversation with the country,” in which Navy representatives met in 2006-2007 with local business and civic

<sup>2</sup>The Navy instead put forward in the 1990s a couple of general and abstract concept documents, which were titled “. . . From the Sea” (1992, emphasizing littoral warfare, and “Forward . . . from the Sea” (1994), emphasizing forward naval presence. See John B. Hattendorf, editor *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1990s: Selected Documents* (Newport: R.I.: Naval War College Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup>A public and unclassified exposition of the 1980s Maritime Strategy was presented in *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, special supplement, January 1986. Also hearings of the Seapower and Strategic and Critical Materials Subcommittee, of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, U.S. Congress, June 24, September 5, 6, 10, 1985 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986). Also see John B. Hattendorf, *The Evolution of the U.S. Navy's Maritime Strategy, 1977–1996*, Newport Paper 19 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 2004). Roger W. Barrett links the 1980s Maritime Strategy with the new one in his “Strategic Culture and Its Relationship to Naval Strategy,” *Naval War College Review*. Winter 2007, pp. 24–34.

<sup>4</sup>Art Pine, “Laying the Keel for a New Maritime Strategy,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, December 2006.

elites in a dozen different American cities, where they discussed the central and crucial role of maritime services in such missions as the protection of the global economy and the providing of humanitarian disaster assistance. The CNO and other top Naval leaders have repeatedly stressed the positive missions of the Navy, especially ensuring the free flow of commerce to the United States and other countries in the era of globalization. Admiral Mullen has recently been promoted to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the development of the new maritime strategy is continuing to advance.

This new maritime strategy is obviously being developed in a completely different environment and against completely different adversaries than the Pacific War strategy of the 1940s or the Maritime Strategy of the 1980s. Although not long after it was promulgated in 1986, the Soviet threat came to an end, the 1980s Maritime Strategy is often seen as an exemplar of the systematic development of a coherent military strategy. In this essay, we will compare and contrast that Maritime Strategy with the new one that is now being designed. We will also discuss the potential political base for the new strategy, for this will be necessary if it is to be transformed from merely being strategic concepts into actual military realities.

### **The Maritime Strategy of the 1980s**

The Maritime Strategy of the 1980s was defined in three essential dimensions: (1) the enemy; (2) the geography; and (3) the weaponry.

*The enemy.* Being a *strategy*, the 1980s Maritime Strategy had to identify a particular enemy, or more exactly, an enemy to defeat in event of war and an adversary to deter during peacetime or rather during a “Cold War”. An enemy is necessary to provide a clear and systematic focus for any strategy, to wonderfully concentrate the mind of both a military organization and the nation behind it. In the case of the 1980s Maritime Strategy, that enemy/adversary was clearly the Soviet Union. (It was not, significantly, Communist China).

*The geography.* Being also *maritime*, the 1980s Maritime Strategy had to incorporate a particular geography, or more specifically, the geography of oceans and seas as they confined, or “contained,” the land mass of the Soviet Union. There were, in fact, four sets of seas which bordered or neighbored the Soviet Union, each set being composed of a near, or inner, sea and a further, or outer one. From the perspective of the Maritime Strategy, the most important set was the Barents Sea (which was the focus of the largest concentration of Soviet maritime power, including Soviet missile-launching submarines and attack submarines) and the Norwegian Sea. Moving counterclockwise around the map of the Soviet Union, the other three sets were: the Baltic Sea and the North

Sea; the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean Sea; and the Sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan.<sup>5</sup>

*The weaponry.* Linking the enemy and the geography, i.e., linking the strategy aspect and the maritime aspect of the Maritime Strategy, was the weaponry. The central task of deterring the enemy in peacetime of course had long been defined by the national strategy of nuclear deterrence, including as a central component since the early 1960s submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). However, an innovation of the 1980s Maritime Strategy was to develop a conception of conventional deterrence, i.e., to propose a credible capability to fight and win a global, non-nuclear war against the Soviet Union. This conception was based upon two new types of conventional weapons: the first was the recently-developed cruise missile or Tomahawk (whose conventional version was designated TLAM-C, with “C” standing for conventional). These cruise missiles were launched from both submarines and surface ships, i.e., two of the traditional and familiar kinds of naval weapons platforms. The second was the recently-developed precision munition or “smart bomb” delivered by attack aircraft which were launched from the third kind of traditional and familiar naval weapons platform, the aircraft carrier. These attack operations would provide air support for ground forces, especially for the U.S. Marines which were expected to be fighting in northern Norway, but also perhaps for other U.S. ground forces fighting in Germany, the eastern Balkans, or Northeast Asia.

### **The Maritime Strategy of the 2000s**

Like the Maritime Strategy of the 1980s, a comparable maritime strategy for the 2000s and beyond will have to be defined in the same three essential dimensions of the enemy, the geography, and the weaponry.

There is obviously no consensus today, either within the military or within the nation, about the identity of one central enemy to defeat in war or to deter in peacetime, comparable to the central place once taken by the Soviet Union. There are, of course, several different candidates, but these have very different features and very different implications for a maritime strategy. In particular, there are three very different categories of potential enemies: (1) Peer or near-peer competitors, e.g., China. (2) Rogue states, e.g., Iran and North Korea. Moreover, China, Iran, and North Korea are also nuclear or near-nuclear states. (3) Transnational terrorist and insurgent networks, e.g., Al Qaeda and other radical Salifist groups.

<sup>5</sup> James Kurth, “The United States and the North Pacific,” in Andrew Mack and Paul Keal, editors, *Security and Arms Control in the North Pacific* (Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1988), pp. 27–49. During 1984–1985, I served with the Strategic Studies Group (SSG) of the Chief of Naval Operations, which was engaged in the development of the Maritime Strategy.

## The Peer Competitor: China

The most obvious counterpart to the old Soviet Union and the only likely peer competitor is China. If China is defined as a central enemy, the main features of the 1980s Maritime Strategy could be recycled or recast and incorporated into the new one.

With respect to geography, a Chinese theater also includes crucial maritime areas. The focus will be on the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and the island chain that links and bounds them (with Taiwan at the center of that chain). With respect to weaponry, there will again be a role for nuclear deterrence based upon SLBMs (but there will be a need for far fewer SLBMs to target China and its nuclear forces than was the case with the Soviet Union).

There will also again be a role for conventional deterrence, including that based upon cruise missiles launched from submarines and surface ships, and targeting Chinese military and political installations. However, the main feature of this conventional deterrence would be rather different from that applied to the Soviet Union. In particular, it will focus upon achieving deterrence with the threat of *denial*, i.e., denying China access to its crucial sea lanes of communication and commerce (SLOCs), especially for its imports of oil through the South China Sea and its exports of manufactured goods through both the South and the East China Seas; this denial would be effected by U.S. attack submarines and surface ships. In addition, it will be important for U.S. forces to be able to deny China the capability to deny the United States the use of these seas (a compounded version of denial or what can be thought of as denial<sup>2</sup>).

As for air support of ground forces, especially the Marines, this feature of the maritime strategy against the Soviet Union will probably not be feasible against China. It is most unlikely that U.S. military strategists will envision U.S. ground operations on the Chinese mainland. Of course, if Chinese forces invaded Taiwan or, less plausibly, South Korea, they would become a much more appropriate target for U.S. ground operations, along with the naval air strikes which would support them.

However, the potential Chinese threat does not take only a conventional form, one based upon the weapons of the industrial age. It also is based upon the weapons of the information age, e.g., infowar or network war involving each of the dimensions of C<sup>4</sup> (command, control, communication, and computers). As such, it is a threat that is deployed not just in ocean space, but also in outerspace and cyberspace. This information-age threat has been demonstrated by some recent incidents, several involving China and one involving Russia.

*Anti-satellite capability.* As is discussed in other articles in this issue of *Orbis*, in January 2007 the Chinese military used a missile, or kinetic means, to destroy one of China's own space satellites. The PLA thereby demonstrated its capacity to destroy an adversary's satellites. Space satellites are of course

crucial to the C<sup>4</sup> of the information-age U.S. military, particularly the U.S. Navy. The Chinese anti-satellite (ASAT) capability clearly poses a potential threat to U.S. naval forces, and any U.S. maritime strategy must take this capability into account. Perhaps this will entail applying the old concept of deterrence to this new form of warfare.

*Anti-computer capability.* In November 2006 computer hackers – thought to be connected to the Chinese – disrupted the computer system at the U.S. Naval War College. A similar disruption occurred at the U.S. National Defense University in December 2006. Together, these two incidents indicate that the Chinese are fully aware that any war with the United States will include info or cyber warfare, as well as conventional naval warfare.<sup>6</sup> An effective capability in this new kind of warfare could make China into a true peer competitor of the United States. In essence, China could leap over and substantially marginalize the U.S. overwhelming advantage in conventional naval weapons.

Another important step in anti-computer warfare occurred in May 2007, this one involving Russia, which was annoyed that Estonian authorities had moved a Soviet statue, which commemorated the Soviet “liberation” of Estonia in 1944, from a prominent location in Tallinn to a more obscure one. Computer users – thought to be operating with Russian officials – sent millions of messages to the top Estonian governmental and financial computer systems, causing them to shut down. This appears to be the first case of a cyberspace invasion of one country by another. (Russia or the Soviet Union over the last two centuries had invaded Estonia the old-fashioned, conventional way three times.) This almost certainly will not be the last case of a cyberspace invasion or war. NATO authorities (Estonia is now a NATO member) were sufficiently concerned that they sent a computer-specialist team to Estonia to examine its impact, with an eye to developing better countermeasures. And what Russia has recently done, China is likely to try somewhere and sometime in the future.

### **The Rogue States: Iran and North Korea**

*Iran.* A “rogue state” is clearly not in the same league as a “peer competitor,” but of course it can become an important enemy too. The largest rogue state is Iran (an all-too-obvious – and much larger – counterpart to Saddam Hussein’s Iraq). If Iran is defined as a central enemy (and the Bush administration seems intent upon doing so), important features of the 1980s Maritime Strategy can again be recycled or recast and incorporated into the new one.

<sup>6</sup> Bill Gertz, “Chinese Hackers Prompt Navy College Site Closure,” *The Washington Times*, November 30, 2006; Bill Gertz and Rowan Scarborough, “NDU Hacked,” *The Washington Times*, January 12, 2007.

With respect to geography, an Iranian theater also includes crucial maritime areas, i.e., the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea (once again, both an inner sea and an outer one). With respect to weaponry and with the ways things are now progressing, Iran will acquire its own nuclear weapons; this will again make necessary nuclear deterrence. However, SLBMs are not likely to be necessary to achieve this; manned bombers and land-launched missiles are more obvious instruments.

There will also again be a role for conventional deterrence, in a way similar to our above discussion of China. Cruise missiles launched from submarines and surface ships and targeting Iranian military and political installations would be principal instruments. However, as with China but not with the Soviet Union, the most important feature of conventional deterrence will be the threat of denial, i.e. denying Iran access to its crucial sea lanes of communication and commerce (SLOCs), especially for its exports of oil through the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea; this denial would be effected by U.S. attack submarines and surface ships. In addition, it would be important for U.S. forces to be able to deny Iran the capability to deny the United States and its allies the use of these seas (and in the case of the Persian Gulf, this would be a very challenging task), or denial.<sup>2</sup>

As for air support of ground forces, especially the Marines, U.S. military strategists will probably not see this feature of a maritime strategy to be very feasible against Iran, especially after the U.S. experience in Iraq, a country that might seem to be too analogous to Iran. However, in order to secure the crucial straits of Hormuz leading out of the Persian Gulf, the United States might decide to occupy the immediately-adjacent Iranian land territory, which would then become an appropriate target for U.S. ground operations, along with the naval air strikes which would support them.

*North Korea.* The only rogue state that is already nuclear, North Korea is similar to China with respect to some of its maritime geography and similar to Iran with respect to its proven ties to transnational nuclear-weapons networks and its potential ties to transnational terrorist networks. Any maritime strategy will have to include North Korea as a major enemy, if not necessarily the central one.

In summarizing our account of nuclear and near-nuclear states as the identified enemy in a new maritime strategy, we see that some elements of the earlier 1980s Maritime Strategy will remain: (1) Nuclear deterrence, based upon SLBMs, will be integral, but this element will not be as pronounced as it was against the Soviet Union. (2) Conventional deterrence will also be integral, with cruise missiles launched from submarines and surface ships having a larger role than before, but with air support of ground forces launched from carriers being less feasible than before. The particular aspect of conventional deterrence which focuses upon denial (including denial<sup>2</sup>) with the use of interdiction and blockade operations will be much more important than

before, so much so that it probably should become a central, defining concept of conventional deterrence in a new maritime strategy.

### **Transnational Terrorist and Insurgent Networks: Radical Islamists**

A very different category of enemy is transnational terrorist and insurgent networks, which for now are largely Islamist in their ideological inspiration. The prototype was *Al Qaeda*, which, however, has metastasized into a network of associated groups around the world, usually with some kind of radical Salifist views.

We normally do not think of terrorist and insurgent operations as a maritime activity. However, if one first conceives of guerilla tactics and then of their transfer to a maritime setting, they will appear as an already-familiar phenomenon. Indeed, in the form of pirates, maritime guerillas have been around since ancient times, and in the form of privateers, so have state-sponsored maritime guerillas. Similarly, there is a long history of anti-piracy and anti-privateering campaigns – i.e., of maritime counterinsurgency. The U.S. suppression of the Barbary pirates in the 1800s is a well-known example. These campaigns were often successful, but under particular conditions, and they can provide useful lessons for our own time.<sup>7</sup>

There are two crucial locales – really SLOCs for the transport of oil—where piracy is both a long-standing and a now-increasing problem. One is in Southeast Asia, particularly the Strait of Malacca; the other is in the Horn of Africa, particularly the western Arabian Sea. Both regions are infested not only with traditional pirates, but also now with Islamist groups and movements. It is only a matter of time when these two phenomena merge and produce a serious problem of an Islamist insurgency at sea, including terrorist strikes and disruption of vital oil supplies. These maritime insurgents certainly should be a central target and enemy in a new maritime strategy.

In dealing with maritime insurgents, the principal objective will be denial and denial<sup>2</sup> (denying the insurgents the capability to deny the United States and its allies the smooth, efficient, and continuous use of these oil SLOCs). However, the ultimate objective can be the defeat and destruction of the maritime insurgents. Maritime insurgency is different from land insurgency in one important aspect: once at sea in their own vessels, the insurgents can easily be attacked with little fear that innocent civilians will also be harmed (an obvious exception being when the insurgents capture a ship and take its crew and passengers hostage). It is true, as Mao Zedong put it, that guerillas

<sup>7</sup> Michael D. Greenberg et al, *Maritime Terrorism: Risk and Vulnerability* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2006); Mark J. Valencia, *The Proliferation Security Initiative: Making Waves in Asia*, Adelphi Paper 376 (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2005); James Pelkofski, "Before the Storm: Al Qaeda's Coming Maritime Campaign," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, December 2005.

can swim in the sea of the people; he did not say, however, that they can swim in an actual sea of water.

The weaponry deployed in maritime counterinsurgency operations would, for the most part, be familiar from naval history: surface ships of course, and also Marine expeditionary forces engaged in punitive expeditions. The maritime forces are now developing such supportive concepts as “maritime law enforcement,” “maritime precincts,” and “naval police on the beat.” In the past, these kinds of operations were called pirate suppression or imperial policing; today, they might best be conceived of as maritime counterinsurgency.

### **Three Adversaries and Three Eras**

A new maritime strategy thus will need to take into account three very different kinds of potential adversaries – China; Iraq and North Korea; and Islamist insurgents. (In contrast, the 1980s Maritime Strategy could focus on only one adversary, the Soviet Union.) China is a peer or near-peer competitor, Iran and North Korea are rogue states, and the Islamist insurgents are a transnational network. As it happens, these three different kinds of adversaries represent features of three different eras, respectively, the post-modern, the modern, and the pre-modern.

*The Chinese adversary and the post-modern era.* In the 1980s, the Soviet Union represented a highly developed version of the high industrial or high modern era, with its vast arsenal of tanks, artillery, aircraft, surface ships, and submarines. These were essentially updated versions of the same kinds of weapons which had defined the Second World War; they were also weapons with which the two industrial superpowers of the twentieth century – the United States and the Soviet Union – had excelled. The central weapons systems of the 1980s U.S. Maritime Strategy were high industrial ones – aircraft carriers, surface ships, and submarines. However, there was also the addition of cruise missiles, which required the new technologies of the new information age.

The potential Chinese threat certainly includes China’s own arsenal of conventional, industrial-age weapons, particularly aircraft, surface ships and submarines. However, as we have already observed, this threat also includes information-age weapons too, particularly anti-satellite and anti-computer systems.

The United States was the first information-age economy and military power, and it has developed the first information-age military strategies, such as those based upon “the Revolution in Military Affairs” and a variety of “transformation” projects.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>James Kurth, “Clausewitz and the Two Contemporary Military Revolutions: RMA and RAM,” in Bradford A. Lee and Karl F. Walling, editors, *Strategic Logic and Political Rationality: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 274–297.

However, China will be the second information-age military power, and it is clear that it is already developing its own information-age military strategy. This includes its own counter-maritime strategy. Accordingly, the new U.S. maritime strategy will have to take this Chinese counter-maritime strategy into account and to develop its own countermeasures. Just as there was a U.S. space race with the Soviet Union, there will be a U.S. cyberspace race with China.

*The Iranian and North Korean adversaries and the modern era.* As rogue states, Iran and North Korea each represent a version – in most respects a smaller one – of the nation-state enemies that the United States confronted during the twentieth century, which was the high modern era. Thus far, they do not seem to have the capability to move into information-era warfare like China. Moreover, they do not have the scale of a peer competitor in the modern era – they do not even have a robust industrial capability. Iran does, however, have available an ally, i.e., Hezbollah, which is an accomplished transnational Islamist insurgent network.

*The Islamist insurgency and the pre-modern era.* These Islamist insurgent networks have an identity which is in many respects pre-modern, particularly their legitimizing and inspiring themselves with Islamic theology and their rejection and evasion of the national boundaries and the international law which were so much a creation of the modern era. However, these insurgent networks are also innovative and effective in utilizing the communications and computer technologies of the information age, i.e., the cell phone and the Internet. Consequently, they are, in important and consequential ways, post-modern.

### **The Central Strategic Concepts: Then and Now**

It might be useful to step back from our focus upon specific enemies, geographies, and weaponries and to look at general – and fundamental – concepts which have shaped and informed strategies.

*Containment and deterrence.* The central concepts of the 1980s Maritime Strategy, and also of the U.S. national or grand strategy of the Cold War, were first *containment* and second *deterrence*, which enforced containment. In turn, deterrence was at first only conceived of as being nuclear, but in the 1980s, with the Maritime Strategy and also with the Air-Land Battle Doctrine of the U.S. Army, it was conceived of as being conventional also. These concepts and the strategies which were based upon them fit the Cold War era and particularly the then-existing international structure of bipolarity, which was composed of two superpowers. Any other kind of power (even Communist China) and any other kind of enemy (even Communist revolutionary movements) were not seen as central parts of this structure and therefore were not central elements of the U.S. national and military strategies which were dominant during the Cold War era.

When we turn to the contemporary era, we can deduce from our earlier discussion that the concepts of containment and deterrence could be recycled or recast and incorporated into a new maritime strategy in regard to nuclear or near-nuclear states, such as China, Iran, and even North Korea.

However, it is well-understood that containment and deterrence are not very useful when dealing with transnational terrorist and insurgent networks. Possessing no state (and no territory) themselves, they do not seek to occupy other states' lands and therefore they cannot be "contained;" moreover, they do not even have substantial and immovable assets which they want to preserve and therefore they cannot be "deterred." Furthermore, even nuclear states such as Iran and North Korea could engage in covert, and perhaps non-attributable, nuclear aid to these transnational networks, making these states ambiguous as objects of deterrence.<sup>9</sup> Because of these limitations, containment and deterrence cannot serve as the *central* concepts of a new maritime strategy. Rather, the central concepts of the new strategy must be able to encompass *both* categories of potential enemies, i.e., both nuclear states and transnational terrorist and insurgent networks.

*Command of the commons.* A promising candidate for a central concept of the new maritime strategy is command of the commons. This idea has been developed and elaborated by Barry Posen, a prominent strategic thinker who is a professor at MIT.<sup>10</sup> Posen includes in his definition of the global commons airspace, outer space, and even cyberspace, as well as the oceans and seas. However, these latter, maritime areas are obviously central spaces in the global commons.

*Denial.* If command of the commons could be one central concept in the new maritime strategy, analogous to containment in the earlier one, *denial* (including denial<sup>2</sup>) could be the second central concept, analogous to deterrence before.

A maritime strategy based upon the concepts of command of the commons and denial would fit the contemporary era of globalization and particularly the now-existing global (no longer merely international) structure, which is defined by (1) the unipolarity of the United States, which however faces the rising power of China; (2) a number of rogue states, including Iran and North Korea; and (3) transnational terrorist and insurgent networks, including the serious and growing maritime insurgent threat. These concepts would also be robust candidates to become the central concepts for a national, grand strategy, if the political leadership of the United States should once again develop one.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Phillips, "Uncertain Justice for Nuclear Terror: Deterrence of Anonymous Attacks Through Attribution," *Orbis*, Summer 2007, pp. 429–446.

<sup>10</sup> Barry R. Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security*, Summer 2003, pp. 5–46.

## **The Maritime Strategy and the National Strategy**

During the era of the Cold War and the earlier 1980s Maritime Strategy, maritime forces were central, even essential to the national, grand strategy which was composed of containment, nuclear deterrence, and conventional deterrence. Today, during the era of globalization and a new maritime strategy, maritime forces are similarly central, even essential to the containment, nuclear deterrence, and conventional deterrence of China and probably Iran and North Korea as well.

However, maritime forces would be more than central and essential to a national, grand strategy composed of command of the commons (and especially of the sea), denial to our adversaries, and denial of their capability for denial (denial<sup>2</sup>). In this national strategy, they would be *unique*, i.e., they would perform central and essential tasks which could not be performed by the Army or the Air Force. Without adequate U.S. maritime forces, there will not be any U.S. command of the commons. Indeed, there will not be any command of the commons by anyone; instead, there will be a common anarchy.

There has not been anarchy on the oceans since the eighteenth century. During the period of the past two centuries, first the British Empire and then the United States exercised command of the oceans, and much of what we think is natural and expectable about human life on the oceans is actually a manufactured product of that particular era of command. Whatever their disputes with the United States about a variety of other issues, all of the world's nations who benefit from the free flow of international commerce, and from globalization more generally, have a substantial and common interest in the prevention of anarchy on the oceans and therefore an interest in having someone exercise command of the ocean commons. For now and for far into the future, the United States is the only plausible candidate to do the job.

## **The Material Base of the Maritime Strategy: The 313-Ship U.S. Navy and the 1000-Ship Alliance Navy**

However creative a strategy may be, it will only be effective if it has a material base which is sufficient to support and sustain it. With respect to a maritime strategy, everyone especially focuses upon the types and the numbers of available ships.

In the case of the very ambitious 1980s Maritime Strategy, the official and widely-publicized goal was "the 600-ship Navy." This would have included 15 aircraft carriers and their battle groups and also 100 attack submarines. At the time of the public promulgation of the Maritime Strategy in 1986, the actual number of U.S. Navy ships was around 500, including 13 carriers and about 80 attack submarines. Because the Cold War came to an end

shortly after the promulgation of the strategy, the 600-ship goal was of course never met, and indeed the number of ships in the U.S. Navy began a steady decline, which has continued down to the present time and with the result that the Navy now has only 60 percent of the number of ships that it had in 1989.

As the Navy undertakes the design of a new maritime strategy, its goal is now a “313-ship U.S. Navy.” This odd number (rather than, say, simply 300 ships) is described as the carefully-calculated and absolutely-minimum number of ships which the Navy requires to carry out its many and complex missions and commitments. Today, however, the U.S. Navy has only about 277 ships, a very small base for any global maritime strategy.

Consequently, the CNO, Admiral Mullen, in September 2005 proposed that the U.S. Navy should work extensively with other navies – particularly those of democratic (“freedom-loving”) nations – to organize a sort of grand maritime alliance which can carry out a variety of common tasks. These tasks include maritime operations against common threats, such as piracy (or what we have called maritime insurgents) and covert shipment of nuclear-weapons materials (the target of the Proliferation Security Initiative). With the addition of these other navies, and a series of “global maritime partnerships,” Admiral Mullen proposed a goal of a “1000-ship navy.” This 1000-ship alliance navy is supposed to be an integral part of the new maritime strategy.<sup>11</sup>

Increasing the U.S. Navy to 313 ships and increasing a U.S.-led grand maritime alliance to 1000 ships obviously will require a large commitment of financial resources and a large change in budgetary priorities, both in the United States itself and in its maritime allies. This raises the question of the politics of the maritime strategy. We shall consider this at three levels or scopes – U.S. service politics, U.S. domestic politics, and international politics.

### **The Political Base of the Maritime Strategy**

*U.S. service politics.* One would expect that a robust maritime strategy would draw upon the assets – and therefore provide a place – for each of the maritime services and major sub-services. This means the Navy, the Marines, and the Coast Guard and within the Navy, the carrier forces, the surface forces, and the submarine forces. Obviously, it is a good thing if the assets of each group can be deployed against a foreign enemy, but it is also important that a group not believe itself so excluded that it considers the maritime strategy itself to be the enemy and therefore conducts a sort of bureaucratic guerrilla war against it.

In the case of the 1980s Maritime Strategy, there was an integral and crucial place for each of the three sub-services within the Navy and also for the

<sup>11</sup> Vice Admiral John G. Morgan, Jr. and Rear Admiral Charles W. Martoglio, “The 1000 Ship Navy: Global Maritime Network,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, November 2005.

Marines. The strategy was carefully composed so that each of these groups could believe that they not only had a role, but that their own conception of their central organizational essence and mission was being fulfilled. This ensured a good deal of bureaucratic support for the strategy. Had the Cold War not so quickly come to an end, this would have been an important and positive factor in Congressional authorizations and appropriations. (However, since the enemy was the Soviet Union and the geography was the maritime areas on the Soviets' borders, there was almost no role for the Coast Guard; at the time, the Navy did not consider this to be a bureaucratic problem.)

In the case of the new maritime strategy, we have observed above that the array of three different kinds of adversaries should provide a place for each of the maritime services and major sub-services. However, the different groups line up against different adversaries. The carrier forces' preferred targets are Iran and North Korea; they are more wary with China, and they have little role against maritime pirates, terrorists, and insurgents. Conversely, the surface forces' preferred targets are these very same, latter enemies; they too are wary of China, and they have only some role against Iran and North Korea (principally in launching cruise missiles and in enforcing a blockade). Conversely again, the submarine forces' preferred adversary is China; they would have little role against Iran and North Korea and none against maritime insurgents. As for the Marines, their preferred mission is as expeditionary forces employed against the littoral areas where maritime insurgents are based and operate; they certainly do not want to launch an expeditionary assault within China; moreover, after the grueling campaign in Iraq, they also probably will not want to launch one within Iran, and North Korea also is not a good theater for Marine operations. Finally, the Coast Guard for the first time could have an integral and crucial place in a maritime strategy, insofar as the strategy defines maritime pirates, terrorists, and insurgents as principal enemies. Indeed, in the future, the Marines and the Coast Guard (when deployed to foreign littoral areas) may cooperate in military operations in ways that they have never done before.

As for the other U.S. military services – the Air Force and the Army – they of course did not much like the 1980s Maritime Strategy. Each believed that they could do better than the Navy and the Marines some crucial part of the strategy. The Air Force naturally thought that carrier aircraft could perform only a modest and marginal role in a global conventional war – ad a less cost-effective one – than would its own more numerous aircraft. Similarly, the Army naturally thought that the Marines could perform only a modest and marginal role in a global conventional war – certainly on the Central Front and even in northern Norway – than would its own more numerous ground troops. Both the Air Force and the Army concluded that any money spent on the Maritime Strategy would be far better spent on themselves.

About the time that the 1980s Maritime Strategy was promulgated, Congress passed the Goldwater-Nichols Act, which sought to reduce inter-service rivalry and which imposed a high degree of “jointness” upon the

military services. However, some fundamental features of interservice relations do not change. With regard to the new maritime strategy, the Air Force is again likely to claim that carrier aircraft (e.g., against Iran or North Korea) are redundant, given its own air-power capability. Similarly, the Army is again likely (but less plausibly) to claim that the Marines (e.g., in expeditionary forays into anarchic territories and failed states) are redundant, given its own ground-war capability.

The ultimate resolution of this impending interservice conflict over the new maritime strategy will probably not occur at the level of U.S. service politics. It will be decided, rather, at the level of U.S. domestic politics.

*U.S. domestic politics.* Ultimately, a robust maritime strategy has to be seen by the nation to be an important part of a national strategy, or at least clearly necessary for the national interest. The 1980s Maritime Strategy was developed during a period of renewed and intense Soviet-American conflict (what was sometimes called the Second Cold War, coming after the Détente of the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, which in turn came after the First Cold War of the late 1940s to the early 1960s). Since that strategy clearly and explicitly designated the Soviets as the central enemy, the strategy's proponents could make a credible argument that it was part of the national strategy of containment and deterrence of the Soviet Union. The only credible counterargument made at the time was that resources spent on the Navy and the Marines would be better spent upon the Air Force and the Army.

The new maritime strategy is being developed within a very different domestic political environment, one more like the late Vietnam War period and the time of the "Vietnam syndrome." The reaction of the American public to the Iraq War and its grueling and indecisive counterinsurgency operations is likely to recapitulate the public reaction to the Vietnam War, and there will surely be some kind of "Iraq syndrome."

However, this syndrome probably will effect most the services which have been actually engaged in the counterinsurgency war in Iraq, i.e., the Army and the Marines or the U.S. ground forces. The Air Force and the Navy have been engaged in almost no combat operations (and have suffered almost no casualties), after the initial conventional combat phase of the war in March-April 2003. Indeed, the combat forces of the Navy have been less involved in the Iraq War than in any U.S. war since the Philippine Insurrection (1899-1905) or perhaps even since the Mexican War (1846-1848). The very reaction of the American public against ground combat operations may strengthen the Navy's case for naval combat operations. In particular, maritime counterinsurgency is likely to issue in far fewer casualties than ground counterinsurgency. However, that other maritime service, the Marines, will probably be caught for a few years between the memory of the agonizing Iraq counterinsurgency operations and the promise of more conventional expeditionary operations.

*International politics.* Admiral Mullen is right that the new maritime strategy will require more than just the hoped-for 313 ships of the U.S. Navy. In

particular, the two tasks of maritime counterinsurgency around the crucial SLOCS and enforcement of the Proliferation Security Initiative will require the cooperation of a variety of local navies and coast guards. Just as in ground counterinsurgencies, local militaries and police forces are likely to best know the capabilities and vulnerabilities of the local insurgents, so too will this be the case with maritime counterinsurgencies. Although in the end, the United States may not be able to organize a full 1000-ship alliance navy, it will certainly need to compose a wide array of multilateral and bilateral maritime agreements and operations.

And so we have yet another reason why the unilateralist conceits of the George W. Bush administration will have to be put aside and why the multilateralism that normally characterized earlier administrations – including those of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton – will have to be restored. Indeed, with respect to maritime issues and practices, this multilateralist tradition was never really abandoned, even during the recent years when a unilateralist stance dominated on other issues.

### **The Greatest Task of All: The Future Path of China**

The U.S. maritime strategy of the future should be guided by the objective of protecting and promoting the common interests of all major powers who are willing to cooperate with the United States for the common purposes of peace and prosperity. One such interest is command of the commons. And one such power can be China. Indeed, it would be the most important one. The path which China takes will be influenced by the U.S. policy and strategy toward China, and particularly by the delicate and difficult balance between containment and engagement (or between containment and the commons) in that policy and strategy.<sup>12</sup>

This balance will be held first and foremost by U.S. maritime forces. It is they who will block China from taking the wrong paths (containment), e.g., the use of military force against Taiwan. It is also they who will enable China to take the right paths (the commons), e.g., further integration into the global economy, and into peace and prosperity. The path that China takes will probably be the most important factor shaping global politics in the twenty-first century. U.S. maritime forces and the maritime strategy which will guide them are thus not only holders of a balance – they are the hinge of fate.



<sup>12</sup> On Chinese maritime strategy, see Toshi Yoshihara and James Holmes, “Command of the Sea with Chinese Characteristics,” *Orbis*, Fall 2005, pp. 677–694.