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Naval War College Review, Winter 2008, Vol. 61, No. 1

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE 2008		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2008 to 00-00-2008	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE 'A Striking Thing': Leadership, Strategic Communications, and Roosevelt's Great White Fleet				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval War College, 686 Cushing Road, Newport, RI, 02841-1207				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

“A STRIKING THING”

Leadership, Strategic Communications, and Roosevelt’s Great White Fleet

James R. Holmes

The voyage of the U.S. Navy’s “Great White Fleet” constituted an exercise in personal leadership on the part of President Theodore Roosevelt and in international leadership on the part of a United States announcing its arrival as a world power. Sixteen battleships, eight armored cruisers, six torpedo-boat destroyers, and associated auxiliaries steamed out of Hampton Roads in December 1907, embarking on a world cruise.¹ The fleet rounded South America before standing out across the Pacific, stopping at a variety of ports of call along the way. It passed through Malacca, the Bab el Mandeb, Suez, and Gibraltar before returning home through the Atlantic. The vessels entered harbor in early 1909, allowing “TR” to conclude his presidency on a triumphant note.²

The voyage was “a striking thing,” to borrow the president’s words, in more ways than one. The armada, the largest ever to attempt to circumnavigate the globe, demonstrated an unprecedented naval capability, defying military experts who pronounced such a feat of seamanship impossible. While at sea, the ships’ crews honed their tactical proficiency, conducting gunnery practice and other exercises. While in port, they performed an important diplomatic function. And their exploits fired imaginations back home—which was precisely TR’s intent.³

Roosevelt advanced extravagant claims for the nautical enterprise he had superintended. “In my own judgment,” he wrote in his autobiography, “the most important service I rendered to peace was the voyage of the battle fleet round the world.” This is quite a statement, coming from a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.⁴ TR maintained that the cruise had invigorated the American national character,

renewing Americans' enthusiasm for seafaring pursuits, and that it had done so while encouraging sea powers to police their geographic environs and discouraging them from imperial adventures in Asia and the New World.

It is worth revisiting this venture in American diplomatic and naval history now, precisely a century hence, when the U.S. Navy is again fashioning a maritime strategy predicated on American leadership. To gain some analytical purchase, I briefly review James MacGregor Burns's theory of leadership. I introduce the concept of "strategic communications," observing that the ability to persuade domestic and foreign audiences is essential to each mode of leadership Burns identifies. I then apply these concepts to the historical record, evaluating the accomplishments TR asserted for the Great White Fleet in his autobiography. My findings are at once of historical interest and of use for today's framers of maritime strategy.

Despite his reputation for bombast, TR executed his diplomatic duties with discretion, taking seriously the "speak softly" element of the West African proverb that inspired his "big stick" philosophy. His approach combined unbending resolve on matters of principle with compromise on less critical matters, leaving diplomatic discourses with tact and good humor.⁵ Wielded deftly, seagoing forces clearly make a useful instrument for this sort of statesmanship, beyond their primary mission of waging war at sea. It behooves naval leaders to understand how basic tenets of leadership pertain to maritime strategy—now, as in Roosevelt's day.

JAMES MACGREGOR BURNS AND MARITIME LEADERSHIP

Leadership is normally thought of as an individual quality. This is especially so when considering a figure like Theodore Roosevelt, whose larger-than-life personality tends to overshadow his policy accomplishments. Most studies of leadership strive to explain how statesmen, soldiers, businessmen, and other individual leaders inspire their followers, vectoring their energies toward desired ends. Lists of individual traits, coupled with tactics successful leaders purportedly employ, constitute the norm in such studies, many of which have the feel of how-to manuals. In his classic work on leadership, by contrast, Burns proffers a richer working definition of this elusive quality: "Leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in combination or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers."⁶

Burns divides leadership into two broad categories: "transactional" and "transformational." For him, transactional leadership involves exchanging "goods or services or other things in order to realize independent objectives."⁷ There is clearly a strong material aspect to leadership. Self-interest counts.

More interesting—and just as relevant to Roosevelt and the expedition of the Great White Fleet—is transformational leadership. A common assumption about leadership is that leaders lead, followers follow.⁸ This imputes a certain passiveness to subordinates in an institution or group. Defying such assumptions, Burns posits an interactive dynamic between leaders and the led, presupposing a real or latent community of motives and values that leaders can tap. Whereas transactional leadership, exercised honorably and fairly, can help all parties to the transaction realize their material aspirations, transformational leadership “is more concerned with *end-values*, such as liberty, justice, equality. Transforming leaders ‘raise’ their followers up through levels of morality.”⁹

An interactive relationship also implies that there are limits to leadership. People are not as malleable as many scholars of leadership suggest. From time to time TR ran up against these limits—notably in the bitter dispute over Japanese

Theodore Roosevelt’s maritime leadership incorporated the message that the United States was a worthy steward of certain universal ideals of good government.

immigration, which at one point threatened to precipitate war—as he grudgingly conceded.¹⁰ If public communications can tax the skills of American presidents, who enjoy a “bully pulpit” by vir-

tue of their office, this is even more true in diplomacy, which by nature represents communication across national and cultural lines. Exerting political leadership is no simple prospect—but robust seagoing forces can help.

While Roosevelt lacked James MacGregor Burns’s vocabulary for discussing leadership, he likely would have accepted depiction of himself as a practitioner of transformational leadership. His writings and speeches are replete with exhortations to moral virtue, “true Americanism,” and the “strenuous life” lived by those possessed of a martial spirit.¹¹ He regarded public office and the bully pulpit it affords as a medium for social uplift, presaging Burns’s concept of instilling end-values. Also, while he would have taken a more skeptical view of transactional leadership, in light of his lifelong crusade against corruption and patronage, he probably would have acknowledged that offering public goods was central to effective leadership—both at home and abroad—provided such goods were bestowed in an aboveboard manner, accountable to the public.

For TR, combining transactional and transformational leadership was intrinsic to prudential statecraft—the art of promoting lofty ideals through pragmatic means, abiding by the limits of the possible. Burns’s analysis can be carried a step farther. In the international domain, nations, like statesmen, can exercise transactional and transformational leadership.¹² A nation’s capacity to do so, particularly in efforts at transformation, is in large measure a function of its leadership’s skill at strategic communications.¹³ This would have

been an uncontroversial notion for Roosevelt, who beseeched nations to follow the same standards—notably the Golden Rule—expected of individual citizens.¹⁴

RENEWING AMERICA'S SEAFARING ETHOS

Now, we turn to some specifics. What benefits accrued from dispatching the battle fleet around the world? “My prime purpose,” declared TR, “was to impress the American people; and this purpose was fully achieved.”¹⁵ His confidant Alfred Thayer Mahan listed national character—a people’s propensity for nautical endeavors—among his six attributes of sea power. Roosevelt heartily agreed, although he did not cite Mahan’s works as authority for the healthful effects the world cruise would bring.¹⁶ Much as the Founding Fathers had constructed a “usable past” to inspire the loyalties of Americans, binding the fractious new Republic together, TR hoped to create a new tradition that prized great sea power.¹⁷

That public sentiment was the propellant for seaborne pursuits must have seemed self-evident to President Roosevelt, concerned as he was with nurturing the national character. Turning America’s gaze seaward was his uppermost concern in ordering the Great White Fleet to sea.

Nations too should behave virtuously. Roosevelt transposed his vision of individual virtue into the international realm, holding nations to the same standards as those governing ordinary citizens’ conduct. The better-off in American society should work to improve the lot of those impoverished during the Industrial Revolution. Just as the doctrine of noblesse oblige enjoined individuals to exert themselves on behalf of the common good, so governments should maintain order while improving the health, welfare, and morals of the body politic. Also, just as he saw enlivening and channeling America’s national character in the right direction as part of his writ in domestic statecraft—Progressive politics allowed the United States to claim its rightful place in the vanguard of “civilization”—he saw preserving and extending civilization as part of America’s writ in diplomatic and military affairs.

The upshot: TR applied the same principles to both domestic and international affairs. Affirmed Elihu Root, his secretary of war and later his secretary of state, whom the president affectionately described as “the brutal friend to whom I pay the most attention”:¹⁸

The fundamental convictions of his political philosophy were in perfect accord with this way of treating international questions. Those convictions which he applied in practice to government and social organization were identical with the basis upon which the law of nations rests and must necessarily rest if it is to endure.¹⁹

To employ Burns’s taxonomy of leadership, President Roosevelt’s motives and purposes in ordering the fleet around the world included stimulating interest and

enthusiasm for sea power among an American populace that had long avoided foreign political entanglements, allowing its navy to atrophy. Roosevelt admitted his quest for sea power faced stiff political opposition, concentrated among influential newspapers and the remnants of the anti-imperialist movement—a movement led by the likes of Mark Twain and Andrew Carnegie—that had opposed annexing the Philippines.²⁰

To overcome determined opposition, TR hoped to encourage and satisfy what he believed was Americans' innate propensity to the sea. He summoned up political and psychological resources. Transactional leadership played its part. Like Mahan, Roosevelt pointed out that sea power conferred tangible benefits, including not only the safety of American shores from foreign naval attack but also assured access to the international trade and commerce on which an economy wracked by depression—the 1893 crash was comparable to the Great Depression—seemed to depend. Mahan had depicted commerce, overseas bases, and merchant as well as military shipping as the “pillars” of sea power.²¹ Self-interest beckoned America to the oceans after a century of apathy toward the republic's aquatic surroundings.

TR also put his bully pulpit to good use, giving his exercise of leadership strong transformational overtones. He appealed to Americans' sense of national mission as well as to their commercial and security interests. Elihu Root aptly described Roosevelt's approach to strategic communications toward domestic audiences. Root observed that what Roosevelt called “the peace of justice” rested on two grounds:²² first, his conviction that “a very rich people incapable of defending its independence and its citizens against aggression” would tempt “some other nation of predatory instincts” to prey upon it, and second, his belief that

no nation can exercise a helpful influence upon the development of civilization unless it commands the respect which follows from a recognition that its adherence to peaceful methods and its regard for the rights of others comes from power controlled by justice and not from weakness controlled by fear. The sending of the battleship fleet around the world was a gesture designed to strike the imagination of the nations including the United States with a conviction that this was the kind of judgment to which the United States was entitled.²³

Theodore Roosevelt's effort at maritime leadership, then, incorporated the message not only that the United States was entitled to defend its own national interests—practitioners of *realpolitik* conceded this right to all nation-states—but also that it was a worthy steward of certain universal ideals of good government, namely, those embedded in his Progressive politics. The cruise of the Great White Fleet telegraphed this message to domestic audiences in vivid

terms, earning acclaim even from many staunch opponents of his assertive foreign policy.²⁴

GIVING SUBSTANCE TO THE MONROE DOCTRINE

Impressing foreign peoples was likewise important, observed Roosevelt, and “positive achievement” was the best way to do so. The “two American achievements that really impressed foreign peoples during the first dozen years of this century [were] the digging of the Panama Canal and the cruise of the battle fleet around the world.”²⁵ He might have added that conjoining these endeavors with a forceful interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine helped rouse popular support at home for an ambitious, maritime-intensive foreign policy.

In 1904, Roosevelt fashioned a “corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine.²⁶ When the Dominican Republic defaulted on its foreign debt and European intervention seemed imminent, TR informed Congress that “chronic wrongdoing” or “governmental impotence” preventing Caribbean governments from meeting their foreign obligations warranted preventive U.S. intervention.²⁷ The United States would forestall violations of the doctrine by stepping in itself. “If we are willing to let Germany or England act as the policeman of the Caribbean,” proclaimed Roosevelt, “then we can afford not to interfere when gross wrongdoing occurs. But if we intend to say ‘Hands Off’ to the powers of Europe, then sooner or later we must keep order ourselves.”²⁸

He therefore claimed the right to deploy “an international police power” when governmental incompetence in the Caribbean basin threatened to leave American territory in the hands of European powers—especially Kaiser Wilhelm’s Germany. In TR’s day, a common practice among the great powers was to send warships to seize the customhouses of weak American governments that had refused or been unable to honor their foreign debts. Europeans would use these governments’ tariff revenues—their chief source of income—to repay their aggrieved creditors. This left imperial powers in possession of American territory—territory that could be used to base warships. Roosevelt feared Europeans would use debt collection as an excuse to establish naval bases in the Caribbean basin, endangering the independence of American republics and the vital American interest in free navigation.

Indeed, the geostrategic value of secure sea communications with the Isthmus of Panama, a geographic feature Mahan had described as the “gateway to the Pacific for the United States,” could hardly be overstated.²⁹ A canal would spare commercial or naval shipping originating in East Coast ports the arduous voyage around South America. American ships would enjoy more direct communications with the modest Pacific empire won from Spain in 1898, not to mention easier access to the China trade. Last but not least, the U.S. Navy could

concentrate its Atlantic and Pacific fleets far more readily—bolstering the battle fleet’s ability to discharge its defense and police duties in critical waterways.

TR thus did not regard the doctrine as a pretext for U.S. hegemony over the Western Hemisphere—or so he said;³⁰ it was, rather, an expression of American leadership of a joint defense against European great-power pretensions.³¹ He questioned whether democratic regimes could sustain consistent policies; the doctrine offered a rare standard around which to rally Americans for grand foreign-policy enterprises. Accordingly, he declared that “it would be well were we sufficiently farsighted steadily to shape our policy with the view to the ultimate removal of all European powers from the colonies they hold in the western hemisphere.”³² He assumed that all American republics shared an interest in preventing Europe from partitioning the Americas, as it had much of Asia and Africa.

Sending to sea a U.S. Navy able to fend off European encroachment thus advanced mutual security objectives. To assuage fears of American hegemony, however, American statesmen had to communicate clearly that their nation had no desire to dominate its neighbors politically or militarily, taking on a hege-

monic role of its own. This was a real fear in Latin America. In 1895, Richard Olney, President Grover Cleveland’s secretary of state, had injected himself—uninvited—into a territorial dis-

For TR, combining transactional and transformational leadership was intrinsic to prudential statecraft.

pute between Venezuela and British Guiana. The American “fiat [was] law” on matters it deemed of vital interest, decreed Olney—primarily because the U.S. Navy could enforce America’s will throughout the hemisphere.³³ He cited the Monroe Doctrine as authority for this “fiat,” illustrating how Monroe’s defensive precepts could be abused to justify meddling in Latin American affairs.

Roosevelt, by contrast, declared that he wanted to interfere in fellow American republics as little as possible, consistent with such goals as digging the all-important isthmian canal.³⁴ He accentuated the self-restraint implicit in his international police power—foreshadowing his emphasis on the Great White Fleet’s constabulary mission. “I want to do nothing but what a policeman has to do” in the Dominican Republic, he assured his friend Joseph Bucklin Bishop, who had questioned his motives for intervening on the island. “As for annexing the island, I have about the same desire to annex it as a gorged boa constrictor might have to swallow a porcupine wrong-end-to.”³⁵ Furthermore, he disavowed plans for thrusting wide-ranging reform on the island: “If I possibly can I want to do nothing to them. If it is absolutely necessary to do something, then I want to do as little as possible.”³⁶

In effect he wanted to show Latin Americans that they were not replacing one imperial menace—Europe—with another one far closer to home. In 1906, he sent Secretary of State Root on a goodwill tour of the region. Thomas Bailey credits Root’s diplomacy, coupled with the numerous South American port visits of the battle fleet in 1907–1908, with easing worries about U.S. intentions.³⁷ Dr. Luis Drago, the Argentine foreign minister, summarized the Monroe Doctrine as “the traditional policy [by which] the United States without accentuating superiority or seeking preponderance condemned the oppression of the nations of this part of the world and the control of their destinies by the great Powers of Europe.” TR congratulated Drago for discerning the “true attitude” of the United States toward its southern neighbors.³⁸

DETECTING AND CONCILIATING JAPAN

Demonstrating strength, responsibility, and forbearance was at the core of Roosevelt’s Asia policy as well. TR was a great admirer of Japan, which had vaulted into the front rank of progressive civilization within a few generations of its opening to the outside world. The Japanese—unlike the Chinese, who were enduring a prolonged period of decay, weakness, and imperial exploitation that aroused TR’s contempt—embodied the manly virtues he extolled. “What wonderful people the Japanese are!” he exclaimed to his friend Cecil Arthur Spring Rice, a British diplomat. “They are quite as remarkable industrially as in warfare. . . . [Japan] is now a great power and will be a greater power.”³⁹ Consequently, “I wish to see the United States treat the Japanese in a spirit of all possible courtesy, and with generosity and justice.”⁴⁰

Indeed, TR considered Japan a worthy partner in the advanced nations’ effort to police the developing world. During the Boxer Rebellion of 1900–1901, for instance, Roosevelt hoped that Japan would join the Western powers to intervene in China, chastening those he regarded as bandits.⁴¹ (Tokyo did deploy troops as part of the German-led expeditionary force.) Giddy at the success of Japanese arms against Russia in 1904, when the Imperial Japanese Navy smashed a Russian fleet at Tsushima, Roosevelt proclaimed that Japan had a “paramount interest” in the Yellow Sea basin similar to the one the United States claimed in the Caribbean. “I thought it for the interest of all the world,” he reported telling one Japanese official, “that each part of the world should be prosperous and well policed.”⁴²

In Burns’s terms, Roosevelt believed a community of interest united Japan with the Western world. He wanted to entrust this new Asian power (along with certain nations in Europe and the Americas) with the same international police authority he had reserved for the United States in his corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. Accordingly, notes Bailey, “throughout the cruise the function of the navy as a police force and not as a threat was constantly emphasized.”⁴³ (To be

sure, Roosevelt's narrative of the cruise as an innocuous venture was not universally embraced. Warned Commander Taniguchi Naomi, the Japanese naval attaché in Washington, "The cruise was aimed at not only enhancement of military efficiency in time of war but also implicitly at intimidating Japan."⁴⁴ In a very real sense, then, the voyage presaged today's efforts to assemble a Global Maritime Partnership to police regional seas for terrorists, pirates, and traffickers in weapons-related goods.

Whether a fleet of armored, heavily gunned men-of-war built for Mahanian fleet actions offered the best tool for international police work was another question—hence Tokyo's ambivalence toward TR's foray into maritime leadership. Then as now, reconciling navies' war-fighting and constabulary functions was a delicate matter. However successful his attempt to organize international police efforts might be, Roosevelt realized that great-power policemen would themselves need policing should their realpolitik ambitions overreach. His solution was to build up countervailing power as a strategic hedge.⁴⁵ Demonstrating the U.S. Navy's capacity to fight in Asian waters, he believed, would deter Japanese adventurism while consolidating the shared interests he believed had coalesced with Japan's entry into the civilized world. Of the world cruise, he stated, "I regard it really as a peace measure."⁴⁶

Encouraging Japan to assume a leadership role of its own while discouraging it from using maritime leadership as a pretext for territorial conquest was essential. Proving the United States could defend the islands wrested from Spain in 1898—in particular the Philippine Islands, the platform for American sea power in Asia—was central to Roosevelt's Japan policy and strategy. The islands brought great geopolitical advantages to an America jealous of its share of the China trade, but they also threatened to embroil the United States in controversies or even conflict. "The Philippines form our heel of Achilles," lamented TR. "They are all that makes the present situation with Japan dangerous." Possessing the Philippines without maintaining a fleet able to carry the fight into Asian seas would represent "a veritable national calamity."⁴⁷

The need to convince Tokyo that the U.S. Navy could hold the Philippines imparted a distinct operational component to TR's exercise of maritime leadership. One of the president's foremost concerns was to dampen the euphoria with which the Japanese had celebrated their naval victory over Russia. Defeating a European great power, he feared, might strengthen the hand of militarists in Tokyo, emboldening them to attempt new conquests that would bring their nation into conflict with Western powers. Geography had conspired against Russia, compelling the tsars to divide their navy. The Imperial Japanese Navy had exploited Russia's fragmentary naval power, using local supremacy to defeat first the Russian Pacific Squadron, then the Baltic Fleet Moscow dispatched in relief.

Like Russia, the United States maintained fleets on opposite coasts, violating the Mahanian maxim that a fleet should operate as a unified whole. TR feared the Tsushima analogy would encourage Japan to embark on military expansion inimical to the Philippines, America's geostrategic Achilles' heel, or to U.S. commercial and diplomatic interests in continental Asia.⁴⁸ "If any one lesson is taught by the Russo-Japanese war, and indeed by naval history generally," Roosevelt asserted, "it is that in the effort to protect even two important points a division of force may mean the failure to protect either and the final loss of the war."⁴⁹

He admitted there was some geostrategic risk to leaving American coasts unguarded during the world cruise, but he insisted that "I will not leave in one ocean a considerable fragment of the fleet, not enough to stand by itself, but enough to greatly weaken by its absence the remainder of the fleet." The virtues of concentration, he maintained, were "elemental."⁵⁰ To assure the Great White Fleet enjoyed a preponderance of force over the Imperial Japanese Navy,

I want our fleet to be a unit. If there is war we must run the risk of raids on the Atlantic coast and accept the inevitable howl that will come, merely using such monitors and torpedo vessels as are available, together with any unarmored cruisers, to try to protect the Atlantic coast. When our fleet goes to the Pacific I want every battleship and armored cruiser that can be sent to go.⁵¹

President Roosevelt downplayed European predictions that Japan would attack the U.S. fleet as it passed, setting back the cause of American sea power. At the same time, he took this slight possibility seriously, asking Admiral Willard Herbert Brownson "whether, if a war was started, we could build battleships during the course of a year or eighteen months, so that if the war lasted that length of time we could begin to have ships take the place of those we should lose."⁵² He also inquired whether the United States could stall for time, working around Japan's Mahanian naval strategy:⁵³

The German and English experts evidently believe that in the event of war, which they (as I hope and believe, wrongly) think inevitable, the Japanese would at first avoid a general engagement and trust to torpedo attacks and the like, and the long distance from our base, gradually to wear our fleet down. Under such circumstances I should like to know whether we could not ourselves play a waiting game by taking advantage of the delay and our enormous wealth to build up the fleet.⁵⁴

TR understood there were economic, industrial, and geographic elements to a viable strategic-communications campaign vis-à-vis Tokyo. Japanese strategists expected the U.S. Navy to surge out across the Pacific in wartime, steaming toward a Tsushima-like fleet engagement in Asian waters. Roosevelt sought to deflate such expectations. If the United States deferred its offensive, it could exploit its vast material resources to build a navy capable of overcoming the

tyranny of distance in the Pacific—and Japan’s attrition strategy—by virtue of numbers. So the world cruise was something of a gamble, but at least, reasoned TR, the fleet would be concentrated if trouble did come.⁵⁵ Employed wisely, a credible navy held major psychological potential, lending weight to his courteous yet firm Big Stick diplomacy.

A cautionary note is in order. The results of the world cruise vis-à-vis Japan remain a matter of some dispute among historians. As discussed before, Burns postulated an interactive relationship between leaders and led. This dynamic sort of relationship is even more evident in international affairs, a milieu in which the protagonists—nation-states—are formal equals possessing fewer incentives or disincentives than those available to leaders in an authority relationship.

The Japanese, in short, were not mere passive objects of American leadership, no matter how impressively or tactfully conducted. Whereas Bailey depicts the naval diplomacy carried on by the Great White Fleet as an almost unvarnished success, Howard K. Beale holds out the possibility that the fleet achieved only short-term diplomatic gains, and only at the cost of empowering Japanese militarists over the long term. Determined never again to see their nation overawed by the United States, this faction launched Japan into the militarized foreign policy that culminated in World War II.⁵⁶ Without taking sides in this debate, it is fair to say that practitioners of U.S. maritime strategy should recognize the limits to nautical diplomacy, not to mention its unforeseen—perhaps unforeseeable—consequences. What may look to Americans like a friendly yet firm display of naval force can look far different to foreign eyes.

LEADERSHIP IS FOR THE BOLD

Theodore Roosevelt saw seagoing forces as an instrument to help uphold vital American interests, discourage territorial aggrandizement on the part of rival great powers, and spread the blessings of civilization among the less advanced nations, primarily those adjoining important waterways. In James MacGregor Burns’s formula for leadership, the journey of the Great White Fleet served dual transactional and transformational purposes. The U.S. Navy represented an important resource at TR’s command. According to proponents of the cruise, port visits and exercises proved that the United States could project force not only throughout critical waters in the Western Hemisphere but also into Asia, where the rise of Japan might hold the islands wrung from Spain at risk. In short, the Navy offered a potent deterrent against European or Japanese pretensions, lending persuasive force to American diplomacy.

With regard to transformation, fostering wide acceptance of the concept that naval forces could perform constabulary duty, furthering the cause of

civilization, was central to TR's maritime leadership. His success depended on the existence of sentiments among the advanced powers favorable to the end-values expressed in his corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. Guarding against governmental incompetence or malfeasance in the less advanced world, believed Roosevelt, was an interest common to all advanced nations. During the voyage, accordingly, administration spokesmen stressed the capacity of great-power naval forces to police a nation's geographic environs. To ward off the perils implicit in codifying a right of international intervention, the president hoped a balance of naval power would check the ambitions of advanced nations tempted to pursue imperial expansion under the guise of police action.

It is fitting to round out an assessment of Theodore Roosevelt and the Great White Fleet with some observations about Roosevelt's personal leadership characteristics. While TR valued consensus in international affairs, he also reserved the option of acting alone—even preventively, under his corollary—should a

The armada, the largest ever to attempt to circumnavigate the globe, demonstrated an unprecedented naval capability.

lack of consensus obstruct what he saw as the correct course of action. He believed domestic and foreign audiences would ratify his policies if those policies yielded concrete accomplishments. His

bias toward action—Henry Adams famously described him as “pure act,” while Carl Schurz, vice president of the Anti-Imperialist League, marveled at his “master nature”—is worth bearing in mind when formulating and executing maritime strategy.⁵⁷ If conducted adeptly, naval diplomacy can advance transactional and transformational goals vis-à-vis both domestic and foreign audiences.

Roosevelt's philosophy of decisive leadership manifested itself clearly in the cruise of the Great White Fleet. “I determined on the move,” he recalled in his autobiography, “without consulting the Cabinet. A council of war never fights, and in a crisis the duty of a leader is to lead and not to take refuge behind the timid wisdom of a multitude of councilors.”⁵⁸ He also dared congressional opponents of the voyage to make good on their threat to defund it. “The fleet is to go to the Pacific,” proclaimed TR, and it would stay there if Congress declined to appropriate funds for its return.⁵⁹ Because of the factors examined previously—the need to show that the battle fleet could circumnavigate the globe, the need to conciliate Latin America and deter Japan—he acted with his customary vigor, leaving it to the American people and posterity to render judgment.⁶⁰

TR professed confidence that history would vindicate his handling of American foreign relations. In his final message to Congress, delivered in December 1908, the president proclaimed that his approach had derived from “the theory that right must be done between nations precisely as between individuals.” He

invited historians to scrutinize his and the nation's efforts at leadership, maintaining that "in our actions for the last ten years we have in this matter proven our faith by our deeds."⁶¹ For architects of contemporary U.S. maritime strategy: scrutinize away. Some insights from the Roosevelt era worth factoring into today's strategic deliberations:

- *U.S. maritime power offers a solid foundation for multinational police work.* American seagoing forces, not only the U.S. Navy but the Coast Guard, can help Washington exercise transactional and transformational leadership. Despite its decline in numbers, the Navy remains preeminent in Asia, supplying the international public good of maritime security for rising powers like China and India as well as such lesser powers as those ringing the South China Sea. This frees Asian governments to apply national resources to economic development rather than large military forces. Over time, moreover, cooperation between the United States and the Asian nations on matters such as maritime counterterrorism and counterproliferation may give rise to an international norm opposing these universal scourges—much as TR hoped regional sea powers would police their neighborhoods.
- *National interests and perspectives intersect with police work.* U.S. naval leaders should keep Burns's apt depiction of leadership as an interactive process squarely in view. While it might seem uncontroversial to Americans, for example, policing regional waters for items usable for building nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons or ballistic missiles poses problems for some governments. As China becomes more and more dependent on the seas for energy security, Chinese leaders are increasingly wary of entrusting the security of vital sea lanes to the perhaps-fleeting goodwill of the United States. Even India, which appears amenable to a strategic maritime partnership with the United States and certainly covets the operational and tactical benefits of working with the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard, would likely balk at any arrangement implying that New Delhi had accepted junior status in the Indian Ocean—its rightful sphere of predominance, in Indian eyes. Assent in putatively universal ideals such as counterproliferation is far from a foregone conclusion—much as U.S.-Japanese cooperation proved elusive in the early twentieth century.
- *Show how high-end capabilities contribute to police efforts.* U.S. leaders should consider the psychological impact of big-deck aircraft carriers—the latter-day counterparts to TR's battleships—on foreign audiences. Explaining the uses of these behemoths for endeavors that promote common interests would advance U.S. strategic communications—and thus the cause of American maritime

leadership.⁶² TR mentioned, but only in passing, that the Great White Fleet had paused on its homeward voyage to render assistance to earthquake victims in Messina.⁶³ This was an uncharacteristic oversight on his part. Today's Navy should make better diplomatic use of its nontraditional missions. The 2004–2005 tsunami relief operation, for example, underscored the multiple missions entrusted to U.S. naval forces. The future of any American-led seagoing partnership could depend as much on diplomatic skill as on operational and tactical proficiency.

Effective strategic communications is the common denominator in transactional and transformational leadership. Deterring foreign sea powers while conciliating them is a delicate task. In Burns's terms, arousing, engaging, and satisfying the motives of skeptical powers such as China will challenge even the best practitioners of strategic communications. Nor is success guaranteed. If China, India, or some other prospective partner repeatedly rejects American overtures, other motives may be at work. Even failed efforts to exercise maritime leadership, however, can produce useful results. Whatever the case, there is no substitute for sustained, painstaking diplomacy on the part of statesmen and naval leaders. International police work depends on it.

NOTES

The author gratefully acknowledges the research assistance of Lt. Cdr. Pat Thien, U.S. Navy. The views in the article are, however, the author's alone.

1. At first the president wanted to send the U.S. Navy's entire fleet of twenty battleships, making a bold statement about keeping the fleet unified. He settled for sixteen when informed that four vessels were undergoing extensive repairs and were unfit for prolonged deployment. Theodore Roosevelt to Lawrence Fraser Abbott, 13 September 1907, in *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. Elting E. Morison, John M. Blum, and Alfred D. Chandler (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1952–54), vol. 6, p. 791 [hereafter *Letters*].
2. See Thomas A. Bailey, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese-American Crises* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1934), pp. 261–303; Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1956), pp. 326–34 [hereafter *Rise of America*]; James R. Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1988); and Gordon Carpenter O'Gara, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of the Modern Navy* (New York: Greenwood, 1969).
3. President Roosevelt intended to put the cruise of the U.S. Navy battle fleet to dramatic effect. He viewed it as an exercise in "strategic communications," to use current parlance, with audiences domestic and foreign. "The people I hope will be interested in it, and in no way can their interest be better stimulated, with better result to the Navy, than by properly writing it up." Accordingly, choosing friendly news correspondents to document the voyage was critical. Theodore Roosevelt to Truman Handy Newberry, 10 August 1907, in *Letters*, vol. 6, p. 745.
4. Roosevelt brokered an end to the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), helping manage the negotiations at the Portsmouth Peace Conference from afar. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1906 but did not accept

- the award until 1911. Frederick Marks documents the moral dimension of Roosevelt's statecraft. Theodore Roosevelt, *Theodore Roosevelt: An Autobiography*, intro. Elting E. Morison (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913; repr. New York: Da Capo, 1985), p. 563 [hereafter *Autobiography*]; Frederick W. Marks III, *Velvet on Iron: The Diplomacy of Theodore Roosevelt* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1979).
5. Theodore Roosevelt to Henry L. Sprague, 16 January 1900, in *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 1141.
 6. James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 18–19.
 7. *Ibid.*, p. 425.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 426.
 9. *Ibid.* [emphasis original].
 10. Bailey, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese-American Crises*, pp. 261–303; Beale, *Rise of America*, pp. 327–30.
 11. Theodore Roosevelt, “True Americanism,” *Forum* (April 1894), in *Works of Theodore Roosevelt: National Edition*, ed. Hermann Hagedorn (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), vol. 13, *American Ideals*, pp. 13–26 [hereafter *Works*]; and “The Strenuous Life,” speech before the Hamilton Club, Chicago, 10 April 1899, in Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: Century, 1900), available at www.bartleby.com/58/1.html.
 12. A fruitful area for future research would be to determine how national leadership relates to “soft power” and “public goods,” concepts pioneered by Harvard scholar Joseph Nye. See Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004); and Joseph S. Nye, “The American National Interest and Global Public Goods,” *International Affairs* 78, no. 2 (April 2002), pp. 233–44.
 13. On the importance of shaping public attitudes and factoring these attitudes into affairs of state, see Carnes Lord, *The Modern Prince: What Leaders Need to Know Now* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2003), esp. pp. 215–24.
 14. TR proclaimed that the “Golden Rule should be, and as the world grows in morality it will be, the guiding rule of conduct among nations as among individuals”; however, “the Golden Rule must not be construed, in fantastic manner, as forbidding the exercise of the police power [articulated in the “Roosevelt Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine].” Theodore Roosevelt, “Message of the President to the Senate and the House of Representatives,” 5 December 1905, in U.S. State Dept., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1905* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 1906), pp. xxxii–xxxiii [hereafter *FRUS: 19xx*].
 15. *Autobiography*, p. 564.
 16. TR heralded Mahan's writings. “I can say with perfect sincerity,” he wrote to Mahan in 1890 after reading *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*, “that I think it very much the clearest and most instructive general work of the kind with which I am acquainted.” He informed Mahan in 1897, “I suppose I need not tell you that as regards Hawaii I take your views absolutely, *as indeed I do on foreign policy generally*” (my emphasis). Theodore Roosevelt to Alfred Thayer Mahan, 12 May 1890, in *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 221–22; Roosevelt to Mahan, 3 May 1897, in *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 607–608; Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1890; repr. New York: Dover, 1987).
 17. “Nothing,” writes Commager, “is more impressive than the speed and the lavishness with which Americans provided themselves with a usable past,” manifest in history, legends, and heroes, not to mention cultural artifacts such as paintings and patriotic ballads. Henry Steele Commager, *The Search for a Usable Past and Other Essays in Historiography* (New York: Knopf, 1967), pp. 3–27.
 18. TR lavished praise on Root for his skill as a statesman. “There are some good reasons which could be advanced to show that Root would be a better President than Taft, or me, or anyone else I know. I could not express too highly my feeling for him.” Philip C. Jessup, *Elihu Root* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1938), vol. 1, p. 423; Theodore Roosevelt to William Allen White, 30 July 1907, in *Letters*, vol. 6, p. 735.
 19. Elihu Root, “Roosevelt's Conduct of Foreign Affairs,” in *Works*, vol. 16, *American Problems*, pp. xiii–xv.

20. On the anti-imperial movement, see Robert L. Beisner, *Twelve against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898–1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).
21. Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power*, p. 71.
22. A nation's ability to realize high-minded ideals while defending its own interests ultimately depended on sufficient armed force. Declared President Roosevelt's 1905 message to Congress, "If the United States alone, or in company only with the other nations that on the whole tend to act justly, disarmed, we might sometimes avoid bloodshed, but we would cease to be of weight in securing the peace of justice—the real peace for which the most law-abiding and high-minded men must at times be willing to fight." Roosevelt, "1905 Annual Message," pp. xxx–xxxii.
23. Root, "Roosevelt's Conduct of Foreign Affairs," pp. xiv–xv.
24. Bailey, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese-American Crises*, p. 294.
25. *Autobiography*, pp. 564–65.
26. The standard account is Dexter Perkins, *A History of the Monroe Doctrine* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), esp. pp. 228–75 [hereafter *History*].
27. Theodore Roosevelt, "Message of the President to the Senate and the House of Representatives," 6 December 1904, in *FRUS: 1904*, p. xli; Perkins, *History*, pp. 228–75. See James R. Holmes, *Theodore Roosevelt and World Order: Police Power in International Relations* (Dulles, Va.: Potomac Books, 2006).
28. Theodore Roosevelt to Elihu Root, 7 June 1904, in *Letters*, vol. 4, pp. 821–23.
29. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Naval Strategy, Compared and Contrasted with the Principles and Practice of Military Operations on Land* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1911), p. 111.
30. David Healy, among others, would contest assertions that the doctrine represented an exercise in international philanthropy. David Healy, *Drive to Hegemony: The United States in the Caribbean, 1898–1917* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1988).
31. Karl Walling, to name one scholar, accepts the interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine as a defensive measure rather than a bid for U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. Karl Walling, "Hamiltonian Grand Strategy, American Constitutionalism, and the Future of the United Nations System," paper presented at American Political Science Association Annual Conference, Chicago, 1 September 2007.
32. Roosevelt bemoaned the difficulty of reconciling liberal institutions with consistent foreign policy. Only ingrained traditions such as the Monroe Doctrine could transcend factional squabbling. Thus foreign policy in a liberal democracy was necessarily somewhat opportunistic. Theodore Roosevelt to Cecil Arthur Spring Rice, 27 December 1904, in *Letters*, vol. 4, pp. 1082–88.
33. Richard Olney to Thomas F. Bayard, 20 July 1895, in *The Record of American Diplomacy: Documents and Readings in the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Ruhl J. Bartlett, 4th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1964), pp. 341–45.
34. Theodore Roosevelt to Silas McBee, 27 August 1907, in *Letters*, pp. 774–75.
35. Theodore Roosevelt to Joseph Bucklin Bishop, 23 February 1904, in *Letters*, vol. 4, pp. 734–35.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Bailey, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese-American Crises*, p. 299.
38. Theodore Roosevelt, "Message of the President to the Senate and the House of Representatives," 3 December 1906, in *FRUS: 1906*, pp. xlvii–xlviii.
39. "Japan has a glorious and ancient past," enthused TR, but "fifty years ago Japan's development was still that of the Middle Ages. During that fifty years the progress of the country in every walk in life has been a marvel to mankind, and now she stands as one of the greatest of civilized nations," not only in military efficiency but in industry, literature, and the arts. "The Japanese have won in a single generation the right to stand abreast of the foremost and most enlightened peoples of Europe and America; they have won on their own merits and by their own exertions the right to treatment on a basis of full and frank equality." He went on to rebuke Americans who abused Japanese students and workers residing in the United States. *Ibid.*, pp. xli–xlii.
40. Theodore Roosevelt to Cecil Arthur Spring Rice, 16 June 1905, Theodore Roosevelt Papers (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Microfilm, 1967–69), series 1, reel 55.

41. Roosevelt to Spring Rice, 20 July 1900, in *Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 1358–59.
42. Roosevelt to Spring Rice, 13 June 1904, in *Letters*, vol. 4, pp. 829–33.
43. Bailey, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese-American Crises*, p. 301.
44. Taniguchi Naomi, in Sadao Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor: The Imperial Japanese Navy and the United States* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2006), p. 19.
45. “I do not believe we shall ever have trouble with Japan,” he confided to George Kennan, “but my own theory is to keep our navy so strong and so efficient that we shall be able to handle Japan if ever the need arises, and at the same time to treat her with scrupulous courtesy and friendliness so that she shall have no excuse for bearing malice toward us.” Theodore Roosevelt to George Kennan, 6 May 1905, in *Letters*, vol. 4, pp. 1168–69.
46. Roosevelt to Newberry, 6 August 1907, in *Letters*, vol. 6, p. 743.
47. Theodore Roosevelt to William Howard Taft, 21 August 1907, in *Letters*, vol. 6, pp. 761–62.
48. Beale, *Rise of America*, 331–34; Roosevelt to Taft, 21 August 1907, p. 762.
49. Roosevelt to Newberry, 6 August 1907, p. 743.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 744.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 743. See also Bailey, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese-American Crises*, pp. 302–303.
52. Theodore Roosevelt to Willard Herbert Brownson, 26 July 1907, in *Letters*, vol. 6, p. 730.
53. On Mahan’s influence in Japan, see Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*; David C. Evans and Mark R. Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887–1941* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1997), pp. 24, 134–35, 514–16.
54. Roosevelt to Brownson, 26 July 1907, p. 730.
55. Bailey, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese-American Crises*, pp. 302–303.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 293–303; Beale, *Rise of America*, pp. 331–34.
57. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, intro. James Truslow Adams (New York: Modern Library, 1931), p. 417; Claude M. Fuess, *Carl Schurz: Reformer* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1932), pp. 370–71.
58. *Autobiography*, p. 563.
59. Roosevelt to Newberry, 30 July 1907, p. 734; *Autobiography*, p. 568.
60. His rejection of leadership by committee likely dates to his service on the New York Police Board of Commissioners, where representation was divided evenly among Republicans and Democrats—allowing partisanship or petty jealousies to stymie action even on routine matters. To avoid deadlock and diffusion of responsibility, TR believed, authority should be concentrated in the hands of a few officials accountable to the public. “The danger to American democracy,” he insisted, “lies not in the least in the concentration of administrative power in responsible and accountable hands. It lies in having the power insufficiently concentrated,” that is, “among a variety of men who work in secret, whose very names are unknown to the common people,” so that “no one can be held responsible to the people for its use.” H. Paul Jeffers, *Commissioner Roosevelt: The Story of Theodore Roosevelt and the New York City Police, 1895–1897* (New York: Wiley, 1994); Theodore Roosevelt, “Message of the President to the Senate and the House of Representatives,” 8 December 1908, in *FRUS: 1908*, p. xvi.
61. Roosevelt, “1908 Annual Message,” p. xlv.
62. Bruce A. Elleman, *Waves of Hope: The U.S. Navy’s Response to the Tsunami in Northern Indonesia*, Newport Paper 28 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 2007), esp. pp. 27–42.
63. *Autobiography*, p. 565.