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# A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower: Thinking About the New US Maritime Strategy

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*On 16 October 2007 Admiral Gary Roughead, the United States (US) Chief of Naval Operations, formally announced the new US maritime strategy – entitled "A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower" – at the International Seapower Symposium, held biannually at the US Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. This important document reflects 15 months of painstaking and creative work, at the US Naval War College and elsewhere, as well as a profoundly different perspective on global security compared to previous US Navy (USN) efforts. The authors were engaged in helping to develop the maritime strategy at a number of levels, and recently held discussions in New Delhi with the National Maritime Foundation and Indian officials on a range of cooperative maritime issues.*

The United States (US), under the Bush administration, has fed a rapidly growing industry dealing with the publication of official 'strategy' documents. Some, such as the *National Security Strategy* of 2002, are public documents loudly articulating fundamental changes in US policy.[1] Others are less

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controversial documents intended to fulfill bureaucratic or legal requirements, or to codify broad policy changes into US military service doctrine or practice.[2]

As a result, the release of a new 'maritime strategy' may appear confusing. In discussions on the new strategy with academics, analysts, and the public (in both the US and abroad), the authors have experienced some tough questioning on first principles. These include:

- Why did this strategy come from Newport, rather than Washington?
- Is this a Navy strategy?
- Why, in an era of jointness, does one service merit a strategy of its own?
- How does the maritime strategy fit into the other strategies of the administration?
- How might it fit in with the strategies of a future administration?

This paper is intended to help answer some of these questions. It draws heavily on the authors' recent experiences discussing these issues in both Washington and New Delhi. As the US and Indian navies consider an increasing range of cooperative activities at sea, some understanding of the origins and development of *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* will both inform the debate and enhance the opportunities for collaboration.

## Why did this Strategy Come from Newport, Rather than Washington?

The US Naval War College (NWC) in Newport, Rhode Island was founded in 1884 for the purpose of educating naval officers in the higher levels of warfare.[3] Throughout the 20th century, the students and instructors at the NWC contributed heavily to the United States Navy's (USN's) efforts to manage threats and plan for conflict, first with Japan ('War Plan Orange', developed in the period between the First and Second World Wars), and later with the Soviet Union (the Maritime Strategy of the 1980s).[4] In addition, the NWC has produced some of the USN's finest scholars, including Alfred Thayer Mahan and J.C. Wylie, and practitioners, including Raymond Spruance.

As a result, it is hardly surprising that Admiral Michael Mullen, then Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) and now Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

tasked the NWC to begin work on a new maritime strategy, reflecting the changing international security environment, in June 2006. Although much of the initial work was done in the NWC, the creation and implementation of the strategy involved a much broader audience including key decision makers in Washington, as well as the following discussions with the US public.

## Is this a 'Navy Strategy'?

No. A 'Navy strategy' would focus primarily on the USN's warfighting role in a potential conflict. It would, perhaps, look much more like the old 'War Plan Orange' or even the Maritime Strategy designed to deter and, if necessary, defeat the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Both focussed on the USN's role in major combat operations.

Hew Strachan, in an excellent article, recently noted that

> "*[T]he historian needs to confront an existential question: why is there strategy on the one hand and naval strategy on the other?*"[5]

Carl von Clausewitz wrote that

> "*[T]he whole of military activity must therefore relate directly or indirectly to the engagement. The end for which a soldier is recruited, clothed, armed, and trained…is simply that he should fight at the right place and the right time.*"[6]

The maritime strategy, however, encompasses far more than the preparation of naval forces for warfare, or their use in conflict. As the introduction to the new US maritime strategy states:

> *This strategy stresses an approach that integrates seapower with other elements of national power, as well as those of our friends and allies. It describes how seapower will be applied around the world to protect our way of life, as we join with other like-minded nations to protect and sustain the global, inter-connected system through which we prosper. Our*

> *commitment to protecting the homeland and winning our Nation's wars is matched by a corresponding commitment to preventing war.*[7]

This passage demonstrates that the new maritime strategy is not just a 'Navy strategy', nor indeed just a 'military strategy'. It discusses the role of other services, other elements of national power, and indeed of coalition partners in preserving both peace and the global economic security that peace sustains.

## Why, in an Era of Jointness, Does One Service Merit a 'Strategy' of Its Own?

It does not. In fact, the new maritime strategy has been approved not only by the Chief of Naval Operations, but also by the Commandant of the US Marine Corps and the Commandant of the US Coast Guard. This alone indicates that it is not a 'strategy' focussed purely on the USN. It rather reflects the views and concerns of the three US military services (one with peacetime law enforcement authorities and responsibilities) that operate primarily in the maritime or littoral environment.

The new maritime strategy instead articulates a broader view of the roles and responsibilities of maritime forces in war and peace.

> "*Maritime forces must contribute to winning wars decisively while enhancing our ability to prevent war, win the long struggle against terrorist networks, positively influence events, and ease the impact of disasters.*"[8]

It recognises the importance of maritime trade in the global economy, and the role that economic growth plays in the promotion of international stability and peace.[9] Most importantly, it recognises that no single institution or State can provide for good order at sea, and that international partners are vital in accomplishing a range of missions from maintaining the security of sea lanes to providing humanitarian intervention and disaster relief.

## How Does the Maritime Strategy Fit Into the Other Strategies of the US Administration?

Mahan describes the ends of maritime strategy as furthering sea power in peace as well as war.[10] This discussion of both war and peace places maritime strategy outside the traditional bounds of classical military strategy. This reflects, in large part, the importance of navies in peace time – in assuring international trade, continued free use of the seas for transport, and access to the abundant resources of the maritime environment. This peacetime role for navies has little or no parallel in the other services, which are instead charged primarily with the defence of terrestrial borders of the homeland.

As a result, maritime strategy lies somewhere between *military* or *theatre* strategy (a wartime phenomenon) and *grand* strategy – the use of *all* the instruments of national power to achieve the objectives of a state or coalition of states in times of war or peace.[11] It is both broader in scope and more wide-ranging in concept than previous maritime strategies, which were focussed on potential operations against a single, predetermined threat. As the strategy points out, it is

> "*…[G]uided by the objectives articulated in the National Security Strategy, National Defence Strategy, National Military Strategy, and the National Strategy for Maritime Security…*"[12]

The maritime strategy, therefore, is firmly grounded in the strategy architecture laid out by the current US administration.

## How Might the Maritime Strategy Fit in with the Strategies of a Future US Administration?

The strategy addresses an abiding interest of the US – the safe and orderly utilisation of the maritime commons for trade and resource extraction. This interest will definitely be kept alive under future US administrations.

The conceptualisation and creation of the maritime strategy, moreover, recognises two key issues:

- Firstly, the strategy reflects an understanding of the mutual, common interest that the international community has in safe access to the maritime commons, and in the role that maritime commerce plays in enhancing global economic growth and prosperity. This interest has been reflected in US policy and national security strategy since the end of World War II, but is more important than ever in an era of unprecedented globalisation.
- Secondly, the strategy also reflects a careful analysis of both US national interest and the changing international environment in the 21st century. The strategy, therefore, not only provides continuity with previous US policy, but also reflects a comprehensive assessment of the emerging international environment. If the strategy were a warfighting strategy aimed at a single opponent, it could quickly become obsolete under a new administration. Because the strategy addresses abiding interests of both the US and the international community, and reflects, for the first time, a serious and comprehensive assessment of the emerging international environment and the role of maritime cooperation and security in that environment, it will remain both relevant and invaluable to future administrations.

## The Making of the New US Maritime Strategy[13]

### Origins and Guidance

The formal process of developing a new US maritime strategy was publicly begun in June 2006, when Admiral Michael Mullen announced at the NWC's annual Current Strategy Forum in Newport that it was his intention to present the new strategy at that same gathering the following year.[14] With that speech, Admiral Mullen kicked off a process that would last a little over a year, one in which the NWC was to make a significant contribution. Shortly after the speech, the NWC was tasked to lead *an open and inclusive effort* to develop strategy options for consideration by the leadership of the USN, the Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard. It was the intention of the leadership to make the new strategy truly maritime – signed by the heads of all three US maritime services – and not just one that was solely applicable to the USN.

At the time of this announcement, the USN was not lacking in strategic guidance from the civilian authorities. In fact, the Bush administration had issued more public strategies than any of its three predecessors, including two unclassified National Security Strategies – a requirement since the 1986 passing of the landmark national security legislation known as the Goldwater-Nichols Act.[15] These strategy documents have subordinate documents – a National Defence Strategy and a National Military Strategy – as well as a plethora of specific national strategies to address particular issues such as the war on terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).[16] The recent Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR), which provides a mix of strategy and budgetary guidance, was in the process of being finalised in the Pentagon.[17]

The USN alone has a number of documents that provide guidance on a range of issues of specific importance to it and to the maritime services in general. These included the joint Navy-Marine Corps Naval Operational Concept (NOC), issued in 2006 and the classified Navy Strategic Plan – a document that provided guidance to program managers seeking to procure the next generation of naval platforms and systems. The US Coast Guard was at the time working on its own strategy, which was issued in January 2007 – part way through the maritime strategy development process.[18]

At the start it was argued that the USN had not had a new, formal strategy in 25 years. The previous formal strategy had been articulated by the then Secretary of the Navy John Lehman, and it focussed on fighting and defeating the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies in a scenario in which the Cold War might turn hot.[19] Since that strategy, however, the USN has issued a number of documents, some of which have been referred to as strategies, and others which have been used as such, even if they did not carry that tag. These include the post-1991 Gulf War "...From the Sea: Preparing the Naval Service for the 21st Century", the updated 1994 "Forward... from the Sea…," and the vision document issued in 2002 known as "Sea Power 21".[20]

Given the plethora of formal documents providing guidance at different levels, as well as other existing Navy documents, why was a new strategy development process begun in 2006? In its guidance to the NWC, the USN leadership noted the constant change in the world order – bipolarity giving way to unipolarity and the latter giving way to something else, as yet unclear,

as well as a large number of destabilising factors present in the world – observations that foreshadowed some of the logic of the eventual strategy. Finally, the senior Navy leadership was struck by the profound and rapid change in a number of factors with the potential to affect security and stability in the international environment – technology, economic/financial markets, the climate, and social cohesion just to name a few.

Starting with such a worldview, and aware of existing policy and programmatic guidance, Admiral Mullen and the senior Navy officers, particularly Vice Admiral John Morgan, the USN's Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Information, Plans, and Strategy, issued several basic points of guidance for the strategy development process. The leadership wanted an open 'competition of ideas' and the process to be inclusive. From the start, this meant not just the direct and deep involvement of the Marine Corps and Coast Guard, but the gathering of information, opinions, and analysis from the other US military services, the various government departments especially the Department of Defence, academics, close US allies and partners, as well as ordinary US citizens.

The strategy option development process, or at least the part spearheaded by the NWC, was specifically directed to stay above the maritime platform level and away from the question of resources, to avoid bureaucratic or inter-services wrangling. Budgetary nuances were to be addressed during the development of the final strategy. The USN leadership also insisted on an intellectually defensible process, complete with an audit trail as they did not want a strategy that was developed in a star chamber, where the assumptions, arguments, and processes were not clear and defensible. Finally, from the start, the strategy development process was unclassified and the resulting strategy was, and indeed is, unclassified and public.

## Analytic Approach

Given this guidance, the NWC was tasked with generating maritime strategy options and their assessment, to be delivered to the USN, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard staffs in spring 2007. After a careful review, selection and refining of selected options, the final strategy was to be drafted by a small group from

the three services and signed out by the three service Chiefs, with the final goal of announcing it in June at the 2007 Current Strategy Forum.

During the summer of 2006, the NWC began to analyse and develop desired options, through a process of research, analysis and war gaming, integrating input from multiple individuals and organisations, while providing a Navy community-neutral ground on which to discuss various issues, geared towards stimulating international cooperation and public debate.

The NWC team, with support from designated USN, Marine Corps and Coast Guard staffers, convened a session of 'grey beards' – a mix of civilians and mostly retired military officers who had participated in the development, drafting, and implementation of the 1980s maritime strategy. The goal of the session was to mine their collective wisdom about both the process of strategy development and about adapting the previous strategy to current post-Cold War realities. The session provided useful inputs, and particularly reinforced the fact that a new strategy had to keep in view both the changed international environment as well as the US bureaucratic and policy environment to make the strategy truly useful.

The maritime strategy of the 1980s existed before the reorganisation of the US defence establishment in line with the Goldwater-Nichols Act, and before the creation of unified combatant commands. Therefore, it was a mix of program guidance for procurement – with the 600-ship Navy as its headline goal – and operational guidance for drawing up detailed war plans. It was not a joint document, but a Navy-only plan for the USN's unique contribution to a potential fight against the Soviet Union. The new maritime strategy, mooted in 2006, would have to take into account two decades' worth of changes in the US defence establishment. Firstly, as noted earlier, detailed and specific national strategies existed for the US national security community, the Department of Defence, and the different services. Secondly, contingency and war plans were the purview of the regional and functional combatant commands, not the service Chiefs or their staffs. Thirdly, to be effective bureaucratically and in terms of the global environment, strategies had to be joint – taking into account the other uniformed services, and increasingly, interagency cooperation across departments and organisations.[21]

The 'grey beards' conference also reinforced the fact that the world was no longer bipolar with a single overwhelming threat, and strategies could no longer have a single focus, with all other contingencies considered to be lesser, including cases for which the primary strategy's ways and means would be sufficient. Beyond the fact that the world was different, the Newport team understood the importance of analysing the current geo-strategic environment as a crucial first step. Due to the paucity of time and given that significant work had already been done both inside the US government and in reputable civilian institutions, the NWC team chose to mine existing 'futures' work for insights relevant to the maritime domain rather than engage in its own future-building exercise.[22] This review and culling of information did not provide certainty about the future, but it did help identify key facts, trends, and uncertainties, and formed the backdrop against which the process was conducted.

Early in the process, the NWC team realised that perhaps the greatest uncertainty was the future direction of US grand strategy. While a decision had been taken to develop the policy options 'top-down,' it was realised that the higher level strategic policy direction, provided by a mix of Bush administration national security documents, was not clear. In fact, though the strategy was to be developed for the next 10-15 years – beyond the current and future defence plan programmes and budgeting cycles – the idea was to keep it relevant for concepts and plans in the longer term future. Given these factors, it was decided to try and develop options that would be robust across a plausible range of future US grand strategies, culled from the work of civilian academics.[23] While understanding that the new maritime strategy would most likely last across administrations, the analytic team used current strategy documents to extract the national security objectives that a new maritime strategy would have to support. This was especially done with a focus on the unique contribution that maritime forces would be able to make towards meeting these ends.

From the start, the team struggled with making the strategy robust and complete, so that it would be duly implemented, through consultation with policy-makers who had worked on previous national level strategies, a perusal of current and historical documents, and looked up guides to good strategies. A particularly useful guide was discovered in the form of an appendix of a study by the General Accounting Office (GAO), an analytical branch of the

US Congress.[24] This study had surveyed current strategies for their effectiveness, an analysis in which the auditors had developed a rough and ready set of characteristics that would be desirable in any national-level strategy.

Using possible future scenarios, a range of possible grand strategies, and some understanding of what makes a good strategy, the NWC analytic team held several strategic level war games to first identify how future US grand strategies might interact with potential grand strategies of key global actors. Working down from these potential grand strategies, the analytic team developed characteristics of maritime strategy option. The idea was to see how certain maritime strategy options would support various grand strategies, as also how they might affect the views and actions of key global actors. In both these sets of analyses – involving games, seminars, and internal work – non-NWC experts participated. NWC drew upon the expertise of the other military services and government agencies, as well as outside analysts and academics.

While this internal analysis was being conducted, senior USN, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard personnel, accompanied by NWC leaders and professors, held a series of seminars around the US with concerned citizens to talk about the role of the maritime services in supporting and defending US national interests. While a cynical interpretation of this effort would be that the USN leadership was engaged in building support for the budget of the maritime services, neither the structure of the talks nor their substance touched much on budget issues. Like the analytic work done at the NWC through March 2007, the general level of discussion was at a higher strategic level – with discussions on national interests, goals, and how maritime services could be used to further those goals and protect those interests.

In March 2007, the NWC analytic team presented five distinct maritime strategy options to an executive committee consisting of three flag/general officers – one each from the USN, the Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard, meant to stimulate thinking and debate within the services. The options were not complete in the sense that they did not address the resources necessary to implement them. Indeed, elements of at least four of the five options can be seen in the eventual maritime strategy that was drafted by the staffs of the three maritime services.

The internal staff review process of the options developed by the NWC, the review by the combatant commanders and their staffs, and input from the Joint Staff and the Office of the Secretary of Defence provide enough material for another paper. Suffice it to say that the writing of the strategy took most of the summer of 2007. The elevation of Admiral Mullen from CNO to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the nomination of Admiral Gary Roughead to succeed him, probably also caused a slight delay in the issuing of the strategy. However, given its emphasis on cooperation, and particularly on international cooperation, it was appropriate that the strategy was publicly launched at the NWC during the biannual International Seapower Symposium, a gathering of leaders of navies and coast guards from around the world.

It remains to be seen what effect the strategy will have on the maritime services – not to mention potential international partners. However, it appears that the new strategy's impact will not be limited just to it appearing in one, fairly short, document. The Naval Operational Concept is due to be rewritten in the coming year and will likely be influenced by the new strategy. The Navy Strategic Plan, the guidance to program managers, was recently signed out in classified form, with pieces of it presumably drawn from the strategy. Reportedly, an unclassified version of this program guidance will be released soon. This would allow an analysis of just how far the precepts of the new strategy have found their way into the entire range of maritime strategy and policy documents that guide the manning, training, and equipping of the maritime services.[25]

## Potential Implications of the New US Maritime Strategy for India

From the start, the new US maritime strategy has clear implications for India. The strategy has at its base a cooperative theme, and maritime – particularly naval – cooperation between the US and India has been the fastest growing aspect of the improving security relationship. The issue for the US and India is fairly simple. What, exactly, is the type of cooperative relationship that the two states would like between their maritime forces – including their coast guards – within the political-military context of their broader security relationship?

For the US, in its new maritime strategy, the focus is squarely on

> "*integrated maritime operations, either within formal alliance structures… or more informal arrangements*."[26]

For India, defence technology transfer is the central issue in maritime cooperation as well as a linchpin for the larger relationship. This suggests a potential disconnect in views, or at least priorities, between the two sides. Such a difference is capable of being addressed by a broader and deeper dialogue between maritime thinkers and operators within the two countries, leading to a shared understanding of how and where these two priorities intersect and how they may mutually support one another.

One thing, however, is clear from the new US strategy: US maritime forces will be operating in India's backyard, in substantial numbers, and performing a broad range of missions for the foreseeable future. Under the rubric of "regionally concentrated, credible combat power," the new US maritime strategy notes that maritime forces will be

> "*continuously postured in the Western Pacific and Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean areas to protect our vital interests, assure our friends and allies… and deter and dissuade potential adversaries and peer competitors*."[27]

This is nothing new. The US has had a significant maritime presence in the Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean region for decades, bolstered significantly since August 1990. The question for India is what view she takes of these deployments and whether, and how, she might choose to relate herself to those deployments given the three strategic imperatives that these concentrated forces are supposed to address:

- Limiting regional conflict with forward deployed, decisive maritime power.
- Deterring major power war.
- Winning our (US) nation's wars.

A superficial example of the change in view took place in the summer of 2007. The Indian government invited a US aircraft carrier, the *USS Nimitz*, to undertake a port visit in Chennai. Although there were local political protests, they were modest compared to India's negative reaction to the entry of the *USS Enterprise* carrier battle group into the Bay of Bengal in 1971. The latest in the series of Malabar exercises between the US and India featured aircraft carriers from both navies, signalling a potential for cooperative operations at the high end of the military mission spectrum. The question of India potentially operating with the US in high-end, combat-like missions is, first and foremost, one of policy and only then one of capabilities and interoperability. Given the political-military history between the two states, this is likely to be an issue that is pushed down the road.

More immediate is the question of how US and Indian maritime forces relate to one another as the US sea services establish a "persistent global presence using distributed forces that are organised by mission." The strategic imperatives that such force deployments are supposed to address include:

- Contributing to homeland defence in depth.
- Fostering and sustaining cooperative relations with more international partners.
- Preventing or containing local disruptions before they impact the global system.

The last of these three strategic imperatives is the probable focus of some future US-Indian maritime cooperation. The new US strategy mentions participating routinely and predictably in cooperative activities. India would be an obvious partner for increased numbers of routine and predictable operations.

The question for India is whether she wants to partner with the US in such operations, and if so when, where, and under what circumstances. The same question, at the operational and tactical levels, must also be posed to the US. A strategic imperative to conduct cooperative activities is just a start. The details of which operations, under what type of command and control, to achieve what aims, with what kind of funding, can – and probably will be – difficult, at least initially. There is also another option: that the US and India

will each undertake such operations on their own in the Indian Ocean region and merely coordinate such operations. This would be less difficult bureaucratically and in terms of policy, but it sacrifices potential benefits both in terms of efficiency and in terms of increasing interoperability between maritime forces. Again, how technology transfers, and related arms sales, relate to such choices remains to be seen. For the US, arms sales and technology transfer will likely be easier to push through the labyrinthine US approval process if the recipient – in this case India – is seen as cooperating directly, meaning, undertaking combined operations in areas of interest to the US.

The new US maritime strategy will accelerate the pace of cooperation in the maritime realm between the US and India. The US has, by the promulgation of this document, become more forward leaning on international cooperative activities, and India is a logical partner in this realm. The issue now is how best, in each government, to translate this potential into concrete actions. At the very least, more conversations, at a variety of levels and in both formal and informal settings, need to be held about the two countries' national objectives and how best maritime forces can contribute to their realisation.

**Notes**

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