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THE U.S. MARITIME STRATEGY: A COOPERATIVE STRATEGY FOR 21ST CENTURY SEAPOWER

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The US maritime strategy is the first maritime strategy that has shifted from a narrow focus on sea combat toward one that also emphasises the use of "soft power" to counter terrorism and deliver humanitarian assistance. The strategy stresses preventing conflict as much as winning wars, and recognises that nations cannot do it alone.

THE UNITED States maritime strategy was unveiled at the International Seapower Symposium at the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island on October 2007. It was unveiled by the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Gary Roughead, the Marine Corps Commandant, General James T. Conway, and the Coast Guard Commandant, Admiral Thad W. Allen, and is titled "A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower".

It is the first maritime strategy created jointly by the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, shifting from a narrow focus on sea combat toward one that also emphasises the use of "soft power" to counter terrorism and deliver humanitarian assistance. The strategy stresses preventing conflict as much as winning wars, and recognises that no one nation can secure the world's waters against terrorism and other threats.

The new approach marks a stark departure from the last US maritime strategy, conceived by the Navy in the 1980s, which focused heavily on offensive operations against the Soviet Union. In the new strategy, soft power and the humanitarian as well as economic efforts have been elevated to the same level as high-end warfare. In developing the strategy, several maritime challenges for naval forces in this new era were identified.

Maritime Challenges

As the world economy is tightly interconnected, the sea lanes and supporting shore infrastructure are the lifelines of the modern global economy. However, while expansion of the global system has increased, the prosperity of many nations and their continued growth may create increasing competition for resources and capital with other economic powers, transnational corporations and

international organizations. This competition, coupled with scarcity, may encourage nations to exert wider claims of sovereignty over greater expanses of oceans, waterways and natural resources, potentially resulting in conflict.

Globalization has also shaped the conduct of conflict. Conflicts are increasingly characterized by a hybrid blend of traditional and irregular tactics, decentralized planning and execution, and non-state actors using both simple and sophisticated technologies in innovative ways. A rising number of transnational actors and rogue states, emboldened and enabled with unprecedented access to the global stage, can cause systemic disruptions in an effort to increase their power and influence.

The effects of climate change may also amplify human suffering through catastrophic storms, loss of arable lands, and coastal flooding, which could lead to loss of life, involuntary migration, social instability and regional crises. Under such conditions, extremist ideologies will become increasingly attractive to those in despair and bereft of opportunity and criminal elements could exploit this social instability.

These conditions combine to create an uncertain future, which has shaped the way the strategy has been formulated.

Maritime Strategic Concept

The strategy aims to address these maritime challenges in three principle ways, which will also affect the partners of the US.

Firstly, US seapower will continue to be globally postured in the Western Pacific and the Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean. As a result we will continue to see a significant or increased US naval presence in the Asia-Pacific region. The forward deployed task forces will have sufficient combat power to limit regional conflict, deter major-power war, and should deterrence fail, win wars as part of a joint or combined campaign. Protecting vital sea lanes also represent a growing priority, as seaborne trade has more than quadrupled over the last four decades and now accounts for 90 percent of all international commerce and two-thirds of global petroleum trade.

Local sea control will be imposed with friends and allies wherever necessary to prevent an adversary from blocking vital sea lines of communication and commerce and disrupting the global supply chain. Maritime security is another priority as the US Navy joins navies and coast guards around the world to police the global commons and suppress common threats short of war, like piracy, terrorism, weapons proliferation, drug trafficking and other illicit activities.

Smaller maritime teams will also be dispersed to carry out humanitarian missions as well as to counter terrorism, weapons proliferation, piracy and other illicit maritime activities. These teams, which would integrate Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard forces, would deploy to areas such as Africa and the Western Hemisphere to promote closer cooperation with maritime forces in other nations.

Secondly, the US is looking for partners to jointly address the maritime challenges identified as no one nation has all the resources required to provide safety and security throughout the entire maritime domain. The focus will be on the ability to conduct integrated maritime operations, either within formal alliance structures or more informal arrangements. The ability to conduct integrated operations will require enhancing interoperability with multinational partners possessing varying levels of technology.

To achieve interoperability, an increase in the number of training exercises with regional navies, either at the bilateral or multilateral level, is expected. Also required will be the establishment of standard operating procedures and doctrine, and the creation of a common data link for shared and improved

situational awareness.

Thirdly, the US is committed to building its relationship with other nations. The strategy recognizes that trust and cooperation must be built over time so that the strategic interests of the participants are continuously considered while mutual understanding and respect are promoted. Building and reinvigorating these relationships requires an increased focus on capacity-building, humanitarian assistance, regional frameworks for improving maritime governance, and cooperation in enforcing the rule of law in the maritime domain.

To implement this, sailors, Marines and Coast Guard personnel would be dispatched on a wide variety of ships as force packages, able to conduct security missions, serve as mobile training teams or perform humanitarian, legal or reconstruction work. There is also a move toward providing proactive humanitarian assistance in the deployment of hospital ships to South America, Southeast Asia and Africa.

Impact of new strategy

The new US maritime strategy will accelerate the pace of cooperation in the maritime realm between the US and its partners. The US, has by the promulgation of this document, become more forward leaning on international cooperative activities, and countries in the Asia-Pacific region are logical partners. The question for regional countries is whether they would want to partner the US in such operations, and if so, when, where, and under what circumstances. At the operational and tactical levels difficult questions like details of which operations, under what type of command and control, to achieve what aims, with what type of funding, would also need to be addressed.

A strategic imperative by the US to conduct cooperative activities is just a start; 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 national objectives and how best maritime forces can contribute to the realization of the cooperative strategy.

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