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NEW DIRECTIONS IN MARITIME STRATEGY?

Implications for the U.S. Navy

Geoffrey Till

Globalization, with its impact on the strategic environment, is the central fact of the early twenty-first century. Some, in the traditions of the nineteenth-century Manchester School, welcome it as ushering in an era of peace and plenty by replacing competitive, aggressive balance-of-power politics with a much greater sense of international community. Others see globalization as undermining their ways of life, their independence, their beliefs, and their future prospects. Still others dispute assumptions of globalization's assumed longevity and worry, on the contrary, about its prospective, if not imminent, collapse. Either way, the present and future state of globalization will be a major determinant of

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the shape and nature of world politics, and governmental attitudes to it will in turn be major determinants of strategy and of defense and naval policy.

Several more points need to be made about globalization, however. First, it encourages the development of a "borderless world," in which the autarchy of the national units of which it is composed is gradually whittled away by a variety of transnational economic and technological trends. The focus will increasingly be on the system, not the units; plans and strategy will, an argument goes, need to serve that system as a whole. Nations will become relaxed about their borders, because they have to be. But this cuts both ways: they will be relaxed about the borders of other nations too. In a globalizing world, systems thinking pulls

strategists forward geographically. This forward-leaning approach to the making and implementation of strategy has been a marked characteristic of European and American defense thinking for a decade now. Thus Tony Blair in early 2007: “The frontiers of our security no longer stop at the Channel. What happens in the Middle East affects us. . . . The new frontiers for our security are global. Our Armed Forces will be deployed in the lands of other nations far from home, with no immediate threat to our territory, in environments and in ways unfamiliar to them.”¹

Second, globalization is a *dynamic* system, since, among other things, trade and business produce a constantly changing hierarchy of winners and losers, and because, historically, conflict seems to be particularly associated with economic volatility.² New players in the game have to be accommodated, its victims supported, and future directions anticipated. The defense of the system has therefore to be constant and proactive, rather than merely intermittent and reactive. This calls for continuous action along all the diplomatic, economic, social, and military lines of development, with the latter’s requirements based on the need to “shape the international security environment.”

Third, globalization depends absolutely on the free flow of trade—and this goes largely by sea. For this reason alone, seapower is at the heart of the globalization process in a way that land and air power are not. This provides both an opportunity and a challenge, not least because sea-based globalization is potentially vulnerable to disruption. In itself, this is not new, for Mahan warned us of it over a century ago: “This, with the vast increase in rapidity of communication, has multiplied and strengthened the bonds knitting together the interests of nations to one another, till the whole now forms an articulated system not only of prodigious size and activity, but of excessive sensitiveness, unequaled in former ages.”³

The “excessive sensitiveness” that Mahan had in mind derives from the fact that interdependence, and indeed dependency of any sort, inevitably produces targets for the malign to attack. But there is special point in his warnings now, partly because the extraordinary extent and depth of today’s version of globalization depend on a supply-chain philosophy of “just enough, just in time” that increases the system’s vulnerability to disruption. Moreover, there have emerged various groups and situations that could exploit or exacerbate that increased vulnerability. Such threats include, obviously, direct attack by groups or states hostile to the values and outcomes that the system encourages. Less obviously, international maritime crime in its manifold forms (piracy, drugs, and people smuggling) and the unsustainable plundering of marine resources all threaten to undermine the good order on which the safe and timely passage of shipping depends. Conflict and instability ashore, moreover, can have disruptive effects in

neighboring seas, as was demonstrated all too clearly in the Tanker War of the 1980s, for example.

The protective function of naval activity will plainly be a significant part of any defensive response, because so many of these threats to the system can, and do, take a maritime form or have important maritime consequences and require maritime responses. Indeed, the Tanker War just mentioned is a particularly clear example of the many ways in which navies “protect the system,” both directly by what they do at sea and indirectly by what they do *from* it. Identifying, prioritizing, and preparing, from among the range of possible naval responses, the platforms, weapons, and skill sets that will realize those responses are the chief tasks of today’s naval planners. To repeat the point made earlier, many of these requirements are bound to pull sailors forward, geographically. This should not be news to sailors, since a forward-leaning policy was a characteristic of *Pax Britannica*—the last great age of globalization. Thus:

Britannia needs no bulwarks
No towers along the steep;
Her march is o’er the mountain waves,
Her home is on the deep.⁴

The defense of the system requires a range of naval tasks that covers much of the spectrum of conflict, a range that seems to be getting ever wider. The resultant strategies are a blend of cooperative and competitive approaches in policy, since the two are no more mutually exclusive in maritime-strategy making than they are in international political life. Such strategies need to produce a range of outcomes, or “deliverables.”

FOUR NAVAL NECESSITIES FOR A GLOBALIZED WORLD

Perhaps four mutually dependent, key, and closely related deliverables can be identified as being required. The first of these is a somewhat reformulated concept of *sea control*. Several things need to be said about this. First, sea control in broad principle remains what it has always been—the grand enabler that allows the sea to be used for whatever purpose will serve the interests of the power that controls it. It therefore remains at the heart of maritime strategy. But in a globalized world it is less a question of “securing” the sea in the sense of appropriating it for one’s own use, and more of “making it secure” for everyone but the enemies of the system to use. This is clearly aligned with the notion that “freedom of navigation” is a universal requirement, if not a universal right, and ideally should not be restricted to particular flags or cargoes. The language and the rhetoric of maritime strategy need to be taken a step farther away from older, more exclusive concepts of the “command” of the sea.

Such sea control operations are most likely to be taking place in littoral regions (where the threats are rather different from, and at least as challenging as, those encountered on the open ocean). Moreover, the likelihood that such campaigns take place in the course of wars of choice rather than of necessity makes the “force protection” variant of sea control peculiarly apposite. There is ample evidence that contemporary domestic opinion and—perhaps especially—an intrusive and unsympathetic media will not bear the level of attrition common, for example, in Britain’s system-defense wars of the nineteenth century in what was later known as the third world.⁵ Sustainable system defense in the twenty-first century depends on the maintenance of high levels of security for the peacekeepers themselves. This is as true for sailors operating off the coast as it is for soldiers in the streets of Basra or Baghdad.

In the post–Cold War period there has developed a concept of liberal interventionism in defense of the system, a concept based on the notion that if we do not go to the crisis, the crisis will come to us.⁶ Best of all is to be there already, preventing the crisis from arising in the first place. “The emphasis on expeditionary operations,” explains the British Ministry of Defence, “has enabled the UK to have a key role in shaping the international security environment.”⁷ This kind of thinking has resulted in Europe and the United States, and a perhaps surprising number of countries in South America and the Asia-Pacific as well, in a strong focus on *expeditionary operations*, the second of our four naval necessities. Navies have switched their focus away, to some extent, from what they do at sea to what they can do from it. But in the second of these they implicitly acknowledge the fact that disorder at sea is most often the consequence of disorder on land and that, in consequence, naval activity conducted purely at sea usually deals with the symptoms of the problem rather than its causes. It is when they have an impact on events ashore that navies are at their most significant, strategically.

Power projection in an expeditionary mode can therefore be seen as a defense of the trading system against the instabilities and threats ashore that might arise. These potential threats include rogue states, inter- or intrastate conflict, and the malign effects of a host of newly empowered nonstate actors. In certain circumstances these can all threaten the health of the global sea-based system.

In earlier ages, of course, defense of the trading system was based primarily on the direct defense of shipping at sea. Mahan indeed famously observed, “The necessity of a navy springs from the existence of peaceful shipping and disappears with it, except in the case of a nation which has aggressive tendencies, and keeps up a navy merely as a branch of the military establishment.”⁸ But nowadays the defense of the immediate political and strategic conditions that make beneficial trading possible has taken its place in naval priorities. There remain sea-based

threats to the trading system, of course, and these will still need to be dealt with, but in the postmodern world they no longer command the attention they did in Mahan's day. Instead the system is largely defended by collective expeditionary action against threats ashore.

The current focus on the apparently unending land phase in Afghanistan and Iraq, however, poses a number of real challenges for the navies of the participants. In the short term these conflicts absorb funds and resources that might otherwise go to navies.⁹ The tyranny of the immediate commitment is certainly a factor in the longer-term budgetary embarrassments of the U.S., British, and several European navies.¹⁰

Politically, the costs and disappointment of both campaigns seem likely to make similar forays elsewhere less likely. On the face of it, this could undermine the case for developing expeditionary capabilities. Since expeditionary assumptions underlie, even justify, many of the major acquisitions of Western navies (in the shape of aircraft carriers, amphibious forces, and so forth), this would seem to be serious news for sailors. On the other hand, the limited liability implied by purely sea-based responses to instabilities ashore may commend more "maritime" conceptions of intervention to politicians, who may be more anxious to avoid casualties and messy long-term commitments ashore.

This vision of a more sea-based conception of expeditionary operations, with much less emphasis given to the commitment of land forces ashore, comes close to the notion of good order from the sea. Either way, the future shape of expeditionary operations and a country's prospective willingness to participate in them will clearly be further major determinants of naval policy in the United States and elsewhere.

The interest that is so evident in the United States, Europe, and parts of the Asia-Pacific in the kind of sea basing that underpins expeditionary operations is an obvious manifestation of this.¹¹ Given the constraints of resources common to navies in what used to be called "the West" and the developing gap between these resources and the range of possible commitments, it seems to make sense for such cooperative navies implicitly to accept a degree of specialization and a "contributory" ethos in the preparation for, and conduct of, expeditionary operations. They do not expect to cover all the colors of the naval rainbow, but, ideally, they remain confident that those they do not, someone else, equally reliable, will. They may not welcome this development or the degree of reliance on allies that it implies, but in the face of budgetary realities they accept its inevitability. Accordingly, less stress is placed on the maintenance of a "balanced fleet" or, indeed, of an indigenous maritime industrial base. This pragmatic approach fits nicely into the conceptions of an interdependent, borderless world and an open economy—conceptions that lie at the very heart of globalization.

Globalization prospers when trade is mutually beneficial and takes place in conditions of order, both on land and at sea. But as the *U.S. Coast Guard Strategy* says, a variety of threats to *good order at sea*, our third naval necessity, imperil this:

Weak coastal states often are not able to regulate or provide protection for the legitimate movement and safety of vessels within their waters. They are frequently ill-prepared to safeguard their maritime commerce and energy infrastructure, or protect their marine resources from illegal exploitation and environmental damage. Combined these vulnerabilities not only threaten their population, resources, and economic development, but can threaten the security of the maritime commons and even the continuity of global commerce.¹²

Such threats need to be taken seriously and almost certainly need to be taken separately. It is probably a mistake to conflate maritime terrorism with piracy, for example; the diseases are different, and so are the cures. But one unifying requirement of them all is the need for maritime domain awareness (MDA) systems that provide the necessary information in a timely and useful manner to the people who need it. This in turn demands systems that are continuous in time, substance, and space rather than sporadic, since the essential thing is to pick up what is normal in order to identify the “abnormal.” MDA, in short, is a permanent requirement that, ideally, should monitor all civilian activity on the entire world ocean. An emerging issue is whether it will eventually monitor naval activity too.

Good order at sea will contribute to maritime security and the defense of the homeland, and globalization means that this is bound to have its “home” and “away” dimensions. Forward operations conducted in defense of the global system can be seen as defense in depth of the homeland. In a borderless world, for example, cargo-container security begins, and may be at its most manageable, in foreign ports—another example of the way in which globalization requires maritime strategy to be “forward leaning.” Here is the *U.S. Coast Guard Strategy* again:

The U.S. maritime border, like the land and air borders, is integral to the global system of trade. Securing the maritime border is an *international activity* that requires pushing the nation’s layers of border security far away from its shores—through U.S. waters, onto a well-governed ocean commons, then seamlessly joining the secure maritime domain of foreign partners. It also requires *extensive partnerships* that integrate and build unity of effort among governments, agencies, and private-sector stakeholders around the world.¹³

The maintenance of good order at sea may be down in the “softer,” more constabulary end of the spectrum of required maritime capability in defense of the system. For all that, it is a crucial enabler in global peace and security and therefore something that should command the attention of naval planners

everywhere. Where navies are, in all but name, coast guards, this raises few issues, but it certainly raises them for those planners of larger navies grappling with the allocation of resources between the hard and soft variants of maritime security.

Here the essential question is the balance to be struck between coast guard functions and forces, on one hand, and conventional naval ones, on the other. Should navies absorb these functions or hive them off to specialized forces specifically designed for the purpose? There are arguments either way, but there is little doubt that the function itself is important and becoming increasingly so. This is especially the case when dealing with threats that shade into the strategic area, such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and environmental degradation. But since piracy, fishing disputes, and illegal immigration can feed, as well as reflect, disorder ashore, navies too have strong defense interests here.

Much of this requires the close cooperation, if not the integration, of all the respective maritime agencies of as many countries as can be persuaded to cooperate. Knowledge is indeed power. This brings us to the fourth naval necessity in the defense of the system, namely the *maintenance of a maritime consensus*. A great deal has been written about “commanding the global commons,” by which is usually meant the sea and the air and space above it.¹⁴ But people are the biggest “commons” of all, and securing their support is probably the single most crucial requirement for the defense of the system. Commanding the human commons provides such a level of military and political advantage that it must surely be regarded as *the* “key enabler of the U.S. global power position.” Accordingly it is hard to exaggerate the importance of this battle for world opinion, whether it finds expression in the parliaments of allies, the editorials of the *Washington Post*, or the streets of the Middle East.

The perpetrators of 9/11 were not arguing for a bigger slice of the cake—they were trying to blow up the bakery, because they thought globalization inherently inimical to their aspirations. Notwithstanding, they are half-supported by huge numbers of people who do want a bigger slice of the cake and who need to be persuaded away from that support by the assurance of a system that seems fairer to them—hence the importance of the political, social, and economic lines of development, in which naval forces are of particular utility given their flexibility and ubiquity. A forward and sensitive maritime presence can help not only deter malefactors from malign actions or compel them into benign ones but also provide a means of signaling interest in a region’s affairs, monitoring events at sea and ashore, and contributing to the development of a sense of international community through a policy of active coalition building. The guiding principle

throughout is that so long as national objectives are preserved, preventing war is always better than winning it.

This being so, the benign applications of seapower have particular salience in broader operations intended to defend the system through the winning of the hearts and minds of the populations on which it ultimately depends.¹⁵ The notion of the “global fleet station” and the purposeful use of sustained cruises by hospital ships like the USS *Mercy* and *Comfort*, and other such humanitarian relief operations, fit the bill exactly.¹⁶ In other circumstances, of course, coercive deployments of carrier battle groups off potentially hostile coasts may be more appropriate. Either way, naval diplomacy requires the closest coordination between navies and their foreign ministries.

Many of these ideas are subsumed within the concept of the “thousand-ship navy.” This is certainly a snappy and memorable title, but it is unfortunate for its apparent exclusion of the coast-guard forces, which collectively have a huge role to play in this concept. Moreover, folk memories of the “six-hundred-ship navy” aspirations of the Ronald Reagan era make some think of it as simply another U.S. Navy budgetary demarche. Finally, the term “navy” immediately sets up connotations of hierarchy and leads to the question, “Who’s in charge?” Concerns of this sort may make the idea harder to sell to other navies. On the other hand, the notion of an informal maritime coalition acting in concert against a host of common threats to common interests is an attractive and persuasive one that commands wide support.¹⁷ Phrases such as “global maritime partnerships” may not have quite the zing of the “thousand-ship navy,” but in the long run they may sell better, because they make it clearer that what is envisaged is maritime forces effectively “policing” the system, with everyone contributing as they wish, as and when they can. Encouraging the currently doubtful to participate and facilitating this, where necessary with deliberate and sensitive campaigns of capability building, must be a high priority. What is called for, and indeed appears to be happening, is a “conversation” conducted by the U.S. Navy with the rest of the world, a conversation that does not necessarily have to end up with the Navy always acting as the sheriff in a host of maritime posses.

Indeed, the tsunami relief operation of 2004 in many ways shows the thousand-ship navy concept in action, since this very necessary task was successfully performed by a loose coalition of the willing that got together, at very short notice, outside fixed agreements, with no one “in charge.” The international rescue effort from Lebanon last year was much the same. Both were made possible by the participating navies’ habit of working together.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S. NAVY?

So, to sum up, what should all of this mean for the service? Plainly, the most obvious thing to be said is that future American foreign policy will provide the framework that determines what the Navy can or cannot do. But assuming that in broad terms the United States continues to focus on a program of liberal interventionism designed to defend the system, there should be a major focus on the higher, more intense end of the spectrum of conflict, simply because no one else can do it as well, or as much, as can the U.S. Navy. Hence the need for a continuing accent on quality in sea control operations and power projection, even if this does result in a drop in quantity, as measured by the number of platforms available. It is important for the Navy to stay ahead of the game in the manifold disciplines it lists under the headings of “Sea Strike” and “Sea Shield.” This should provide increased operational advantage over prospective adversaries, in the shape of greater effectiveness, accuracy, and discrimination in the use of force and of greater levels of force protection for all campaign participants. The result will be increased confidence among political decision makers at times of strain, something that may well be even more important in the wake of the experience of Iraq and Afghanistan.

The snag is that this may well sustain, if not strengthen, a strategic culture of resolute preeminence at all costs that was certainly appropriate in the twentieth century, when peer competition with other major naval powers was the order of the day, but that may be less appropriate in the globalizing world of the twenty-first century. Such aspirations for strategic dominance may unsuit the Navy for significant contributions at the lower end of the spectrum of conflict, while feeding the prejudices of those who complain of the malign effects of a U.S.-dominated unipolar world.

Moreover, these aspirations come at a level of economic cost likely to prove increasingly burdensome in the future, perhaps unnecessarily so. Given the emerging littoral environment in which these operations are likely to take place, less powerful allies have much to offer—in, for example, the operation of SSKs (i.e., diesel-powered hunter-killer submarines), mine warfare, the insertion of special forces, and limited power-projection operations. Such operational and budgetary considerations would seem to reinforce the political benefits of a U.S. Navy approach that is as “inclusive” as physically possible to the practice of the most demanding aspects of naval business. For all these reasons, the more “exclusive” American seapower is, the less likely it is to be strategically effective in the long run.

The positive encouragement of allied participation in all manner of maritime operations calls for a focused, deliberate, and intelligent maritime assault on all the things that make this difficult at the moment. Interoperability is key. This is

partly a matter of shared technical proficiency, which is ultimately “fixable,” and also of protocols and standard operating procedures.¹⁸ The American tendency to overclassify everything does not help.¹⁹ Policy divergences with coalition partners may be even less tractable. Overall, such difficulties may be real and based on hard experience or imagined and merely the kind of general wariness toward giants that “little guys” might be expected to display.

The maintenance of a permanent forward presence in critical areas should provide the means to increase interoperability through near-continuous combined action with partners. The most critical area for this at the moment is what has been described as the “supercomplex” that stretches from the Gulf to the Northeast Pacific but “goes light” in the middle around Southeast Asia.²⁰ With its increasing industrial base, merchant shipping traffic, and port facilities, this area is rapidly becoming the center of gravity of the world globalization system. This is not to say that areas such as the Gulf of Guinea, the Mediterranean, or the Caribbean are not important but merely to suggest that at the moment their problems and issues can be handled mostly by regional forces acting in concert, with the U.S. Navy benignly in the background. Africa, indeed, is likely to be of increasing importance, but the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific will nonetheless remain, collectively, the major focus for the time being.²¹

The range of requirements also calls for the strongest possible integration of the naval effort with other forces of maritime order—in the American case, most obviously the Coast Guard. Often, indeed, as both the Japanese and the Americans discovered in the Straits of Malacca, coast-guard forces will provide far more appropriate responses to developing situations, responses that may well be able to head off the need for more forceful interventions later on.

Coast-guard forces have much to offer a unified and integrated maritime strategy, because the increasing value of the resources to be found in the exclusive economic zones provides governments around the world with very real economic incentives to make use of U.S. Coast Guard expertise. The U.S. Coast Guard is a unique organization, unlikely to be replicated anywhere else; nonetheless, it has much to offer in the way of advice on many aspects of maritime security that can be adopted or adapted by anyone else—and it can make that advice available in a manner that represents absolutely no threat to the sovereignty of others.²² By doing so, it indirectly defends the system, while at the same time serving American national interests and contributing to the maritime outreach of the United States. Much of this, of course, depends on its *not* being seen as the U.S. Navy. Nonetheless, the Coast Guard does not have the ships and the personnel to establish a presence all round the world, and its global effectiveness rests in significant degree on its symbiotic relationship with the Navy.

To a lesser extent the same applies when it comes to security nearer home, where strong naval forces clearly provide reserve capacities for the civil power that will normally be exercised by constabulary forces. In many ways, therefore, the closer the relationship between the U.S. Coast Guard and the Navy the better, provided, of course, that the essential differences between the two are preserved as well.

Underpinning much of this in the Navy should perhaps be a sense of humility—for however effective hard naval power may be, it remains but part of the military line of development, and that in turn is only part of the broader range of softer, political, diplomatic, and economic power needed to defend the system. The success of the “smiling diplomacy” of China in reversing stereotypes of its intentions in Southeast Asia and elsewhere is a timely reminder of the fact that hard power is at its most effective when used with restraint—at least in situations short of all-out conflict.

But this sense of humility should not be pushed so far that “the naval case” is not explained sufficiently well and sufficiently fully to publics and decision makers, especially given the tight margins within which the services all operate. One requirement will presumably be to ensure that any “naval” strategy and policy also becomes “national” and so secures the resources necessary for it to achieve its purposes. For this approach to be accepted, naval policy certainly will need meshing-in with foreign policy. In the early twentieth century the U.S. Marines were sometimes considered “State Department troops,” and to the benefit of both. Nowadays, the same might well need to apply to the whole of the maritime team.

BUT WILL GLOBALIZATION SURVIVE?

But this review of what might be called “postmodern” maritime defense presupposes a fundamental change in the nature of international politics. It assumes that we are indeed living “on the cusp of a new era . . . [one] plagued by uncertainty and change and unrestricted warfare, an era of shifting global threats and challenging new opportunities . . . that calls for new skill sets, deeper partnerships, and mutual understanding.”²³ It assumes that sea-based globalization will continue and that its defense remains at the heart of naval policy around the world.

But the threats that globalization faces are serious and may prove fatal. It is worth remembering that in many ways the world of the late nineteenth century was, in its own terms, as globalized as ours is today but that the system collapsed in the face of commercial rivalry, the discontent of the disadvantaged, and growing nationalism.²⁴ In some ways, these problems were in fact a by-product of globalization, especially in regard to the kind of inequality of benefit that bred

nationalism. The result of this was a world war, which, as Niall Ferguson has observed,

sank globalization—literally. Nearly thirteen million tons of shipping went to the bottom of the sea as a result of German naval action, most of it by U-boats. International trade, investment and emigration all collapsed. In the war's aftermath, revolutionary regimes arose that were fundamentally hostile to international economic integration. Plans replaced the market; autarky and protection took the place of free trade. Flows of goods diminished; flows of people and capital all but dried up.²⁵

This is indeed a chilling historical example of the way in which war can, to borrow Thomas Friedman's phrase, "unflatten" the world. If it is indeed true that "war and warfare will always be with us; war is a permanent feature of the human condition," then it is far from inconceivable that the same might happen again.²⁶

Accordingly, the prudent naval planner might well feel the need to bear this lesson of history in mind, especially given the fact that our kind of globalization faces an extra range of threats (most obviously international terrorism, resource depletion, and environmental degradation) that theirs did not. A Marxist might even argue that all of this is a result of the "inherent contradictions" of global capitalism and, accordingly, is historically inevitable.²⁷

Should this Marxist analysis be right and globalization either collapse or enter a period of terminal decline, we would face a bleaker, harder, much less communal world of increased levels of competition in which coercive military force and power politics dominate the strategic horizon. We would have, in short, a warlike future.

Current expectations seem to lie somewhere between these two future extremes, of secure globalization, on the one hand, and blood-chilling system collapse on the other, perhaps especially in the crucial Asia-Pacific "supercomplex" area already alluded to. Although in many ways at the heart of the globalization process, that area has been authoritatively described as "an exemplar of traditional regional security dynamics found largely in the military-political mode. . . . Old fashioned concerns about power still dominate the security agenda of most of the regional powers, and war remains a distinct, if constrained possibility."²⁸ "Realistic" assumptions may also focus on the sheer unpredictability of future events, here as elsewhere. Who can really know what the future may bring? Should we not guard against the consequences of our inability to predict? Naval planning would be much affected by a drift in this direction, and for all these reasons there is a persuasive argument that prudent planners should aim to keep their powder dry in case it does.

This suggests much more of a stress on going forward to the past, on preparing navies for action against other navies rather than largely on the prosecution of collective expeditionary campaigns ashore. These latter may indeed become much less frequent, as we have noted above. They are inspired by a sense of liberal interventionism that is not new but has waxed and waned in the past, according to the vagaries of politics and hard experience. In the last great era of globalization, the British prime minister Lord Palmerston was inclined this way because he thought that “liberalism . . . was far more likely than despotism to produce governments stable, pacific and friendly to England and English trade.” But he was challenged by Lord Melbourne, who argued that on the contrary, such assisted powers “never take our advice . . . treat us with the utmost contempt and take every measure hostile to our interests; they are anxious to prove that we have not the least influence on them.”²⁹ Such interventions, in short, would do no good. Instead the focus should be on the defense of national tranquility and on those who might threaten it directly. These issues come and go—but they do come back again, it would seem.

In a world much less determined by the exigencies of a mutually dependent community of production and consumption, the views of latter-day Melbournes are likely to prevail. Naval preparations would then be framed by analysis of what other possibly competitive navies are doing, and there would be much more emphasis on more “Mahanian” concepts of sea control, along with all the naval disciplines that contribute to the independence of action that this implies. For the United States, China and its navy is the most-discussed prospective peer competitor that might need treating in this way. Other countries in this region may take a similar view or focus on their immediate neighbors instead—or, indeed, as well. All this implies preparation for high-intensity “fleet versus fleet” engagements, as Admiral Sergei Gorshkov used to call them. Relevant capacities are expensive and probably optimized for open-ocean operations rather than land attack. Weaponry and sensor mixes emphasize antisubmarine and antiair warfare, antiship missiles, and so on. For the U.S. Navy this aspiration would seem to suggest a need for strong, fully networked naval forces, centered on carrier battle groups, permanently forward in the major area of concern, and it would also seem to reinforce the inclination toward the high-intensity end of the spectrum, even if this does make cooperative action with allies more difficult. Finally, such an approach also ultimately justifies the maintenance of nuclear deterrent forces at sea and everything that goes with it.

All this suggests a preference for the maintenance of the traditional naval fighting disciplines and a balanced, not a specialized, “contributory” fleet. A resolute defense of a secure indigenous maritime base, if necessary at the price of industrial and commercial cooperation with allies, would also seem to make

sense. The greater the extent to which this is part of a larger national policy to close and defend the economy against external pressure, the more it would be at variance with the free trade conceptions that underpin globalization. Most countries feel such pressures to some extent.³⁰

There is, sadly, no denying that there are tensions between these two approaches in the development of maritime strategy and naval policy. Accordingly, the U.S. Navy, like all the others, needs to make choices as to where the balance is to be struck between them, unless it has the kind of resource base that would allow it to do both as much as it wants to. Given that a resource turnaround of this scale is unlikely, a carefully judged twin-track approach against high-end, state-centric threats, on the one hand, and low-end, people-centered threats, on the other, seems called for. The result could be a novel mix of different types of maritime (naval, marine, and coast guard) forces, in which numbers of platforms are inevitably set against their quality. Although this is currently the subject of a wide-ranging debate about a future maritime strategy for the United States, a debate intended to help produce the answers, this is essentially a political decision that rests on political analysis of the state of the world, its likely future, and the desired future role of the United States.

But here, perhaps, naval planners not only reflect international realities but also mold them. They have an effect—and, indeed, that is surely the point of having navies in the first place. Too much stress on the more competitive variants of naval policy might in some circumstances become something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, as arguably it did in the days before the first and second world wars. Demonizing China and its navy, for instance, is likely to produce just the kind of Chinese navy the United States would not wish to see. That being so, there is much to suggest a policy presumption in favor of the essentially cooperative defense of the sea-based globalized world system, if only from fear of the darker, bleaker world that might succeed it.

NOTES

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1. Tony Blair, *Reflections on 21st Century Security*, speech on HMS *Albion*, Plymouth 12 January 2007.
2. Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), pp. lix–lxii.
3. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Retrospect and Prospect* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, 1902), p. 144.
4. Thomas Campbell [1777–1844], *Ye Mariners of England*, in Peter Jay, *The Sea! The Sea!* (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2005), p. 45.
5. The level of this attrition is often forgotten these days. But with the exception of such

- grand disasters as the early days of the Crimean War, the retreat from Kabul, or the battle of Isandlwana, such casualties rarely attracted political controversy, even comment. It was accepted as an inevitable part of the burdens of empire.
6. *Strategic Defence Review* (London: The Stationery Office [hereafter TSO], 1998), introduction, para. 6.
 7. *The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter* (London: TSO, 2002), introduction.
 8. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, 1890), p. 23.
 9. "Gates Plans to Use Air Force, Navy Funds to Cover Army Costs in Iraq, Afghanistan," *National Journal CongressDaily AM*, 12 April 2007; George Friedman, "The Limitations and Necessity of Naval Power," *Stratfor*, 10 April 2007.
 10. Paul Kennedy, "The Rise and Fall of Navies," *International Herald Tribune*, 5 April 2007.
 11. See Geoffrey Till, *Naval Transformation, Ground Forces and the Expeditionary Impulse: The Sea-Basing Debate*, Letort Papers (Carlisle, Pa.: SSI, December 2006).
 12. *The U.S. Coast Guard Strategy for Maritime Safety, Security, and Stewardship* (Washington, D.C.: 2007), p. 51.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 35 [emphasis original].
 14. Barry Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundations of US Hegemony," *International Security* 28, no. 1 (Summer 2003), pp. 5–46, esp. 8–13.
 15. *British Maritime Doctrine*, BR 1806, 3rd ed. (London: TSO, 2004), p. 58. Interestingly earlier editions had rather more on this concept—cf. pp. 33–36, 103, in the first edition, 1995.
 16. See 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), pp. 101–106, 108–109, et seq., available at www.nwc.navy.mil/press/documents/28.pdf.
 17. See "The Commanders Respond," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (March 2007), pp. 14–31, and "Charting the Course: World Navy Chiefs Look to the Future," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 2 May 2007, pp. 23–50.
 18. See Paul T. Mitchell, *Network Centric Warfare: Coalition Operations in the Age of US Military Primacy*, Adelphi Paper 385 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006).
 19. This was a problem even in the tsunami relief operation; Elleman, *Waves of Hope*, p. 72.
 20. Barry Buzan and Ole Waever have developed the useful notion of the supercomplex in *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003).
 21. Current travails in the establishment of AFRICOM suggest there is advantage in such an approach. "Africa United in Rejecting US Request for Military HQ," *Guardian*, 26 June 2007.
 22. The Model Maritime Service Code, issued by the U.S. Coast Guard in 1995 and now being reworked, is a good example of this, since it is intended to "assist other nations in developing a Maritime Force to help them meet the changing needs of the twenty-first century."
 23. Admiral Michael G. Mullen, "CNO Guiding Principles," in U.S. Navy Dept., *CNO Guidance for 2006: Meeting the Challenge of a New Era* (Washington, D.C.: October 2006), p. 2.
 24. Jeffrey A. Frieden, *Global Capitalism: Its Fall and Rise in the Twentieth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), p. 16.
 25. Ferguson, *The War of the World*, p. 73.
 26. Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: The Globalized World in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 458; Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (London: Phoenix, 2005), p. 370.
 27. Timothy Garton Ash, "Global Capitalism Has No Serious Rivals: But It Could Destroy Itself," *Guardian*, 22 February 2007.
 28. Buzan and Waever, *Regions and Powers*, p. 93.
 29. David Cecil, *Lord, or the Later Life of Lord Melbourne* (London: Constable, 1954), p. 115.
 30. Tom Bower, "The Sale of Liverpool Shows How Britain Lets Its Lifeblood Drain Away," *Guardian*, 9 February 2007.