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The First Naval War College Seapower Symposium

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The following address was delivered by Vice Admiral Richard G. Colbert, President, Naval War College as the welcoming remarks to the U.S. Naval War College Seapower Symposium held in Newport, R.I., from 17 to 20 November 1969. The symposium was attended by top naval leaders of 37 friendly countries.

Today we are assembled in a truly historic gathering. Never before have so many brilliant and perceptive naval minds, from so many countries, been brought together in the pursuit of one common purpose.

I feel it is important to clarify at the outset of our discussions the reason for this gathering, what that common purpose is, and to explain briefly the philosophy which it is hoped will be the foundation of the next 4 days' events.

The seed of this symposium was sown over 13 years ago when the Naval Command Course was initiated here at the U.S. Naval War College. This course, as you may know, was intended to bring together senior naval officers from countries throughout the free world--your countries--to study together for a year in Newport. It was hoped that an open exchange of opinions, thoughts, and ideas in a quiet atmosphere of academic freedom would foster not only their education, but also their mutual understanding.

While at the time many questioned the feasibility of bringing officers from so many countries, with diverse views on many problems, together here, this experiment proved to be an unqualified

THE FIRST NAVAL WAR COLLEGE SEAPOWER SYMPOSIUM

An Introduction

success. The warm personal relationships and broadened sympathy which exist among Naval Command Course graduates around the world is a testimony to the validity of the goals of the course.

Out of this success sprang a new idea. It was conceived that a convocation, unconnected with the Naval Command Course, of the top naval leaders of the free world might be similarly productive and rewarding. Today that idea has come to fruition.

The purpose of this symposium, therefore, is quite simply to promote mutual understanding of our common problems and interests as well as each other's problems and interests. In an effort to do this, we have tried to focus our full attention on the creation of an environment conducive to a meaningful exchange of thinking. I would caution that we cannot expect to arrive at pragmatic and finite solutions to the many problems of the maritime world we will discuss. It would be unrealistic to anticipate even a consensus on these matters.

The goal envisioned is rather to establish a forum for discussion in which every participant will feel at

liberty to discuss freely and openly any aspects of maritime affairs he considers important, to the end that collective examination will broaden our individual and overall appreciation of these affairs.

At this moment in history the patterns of naval and other maritime affairs are shifting. Significant changes are taking place in the overall balance of world seapower. In recent memory there is perhaps no better or more appropriate time for such a meeting as this. Moreover, within this hall this morning there exists a broad spectrum of knowledge as well as a diversity of opinion and experience, consolidated and molded by national aspirations and national needs.

Over the years each of us has had the opportunity to observe developments on the world maritime scene. Each of us has conditioned our estimate of the significance of these events based on our individual experiences and national perspectives. These points of view—the basic beliefs which have arisen from them—and the pure professional naval competence which each of us can bring to the consideration of these matters—all could provide threads of a cloth which might well be woven into a durable and serviceable fabric.

On each day of this symposium, we will have the opportunity to hear the remarks of some eminent and distinguished naval leader. From a practical viewpoint, we have arranged for these presentations to be made by U.S. naval officers in order to facilitate our planning. I believe that the thoughts expressed will be of real significance to us all in shaping our initial exchanges during committee discussions and the plenary meetings. However, I would emphasize that they should be recognized as only a basis, a departure point, for our proceedings.

Of course, since these speakers are U.S. naval officers, a considerable portion of their comments will be oriented toward the U.S. Navy and their indivi-

dual views of its problems and its strategy. I would like to make clear, however, that there is no intention to direct the efforts of this symposium toward a similar orientation. Rather it is planned and expected that in the next 4 days we will look far beyond the limits of U.S. interests, and that our discussions will broadly focus on the prospects and problems of the whole maritime world.

The topics of the major addresses have been carefully selected with just this goal in view: to expose the maximum possible number of topics on as wide a spectrum as time and coherence permit.

And so, it may be that you will wish to diverge from the subjects investigated in our major addresses. If you so desire, you are at complete liberty—you are sincerely encouraged—to expand and digress, as you see fit.

The heritage and guiding spirit of the U.S. Naval War College remain today unaltered from the time of Alfred Thayer Mahan. That spirit is the immutable precept of complete freedom of academic inquiry and privacy of remarks. This includes the right to confirm, elaborate, modify, or dissent—in a constructive and reasoned fashion—whenever one's beliefs or experience dictate. This principle applies just as fully to this symposium as to the daily curriculum of our resident schools. And as in the case with our own staff, students, and guest lecturers, no remarks will be for attribution, and each comment you might make will be treated as private and privileged.

The goals we have set ourselves are ambitious ones. It is doubtful, if not unlikely, that they can be achieved unless each participant enters into the discussions ahead with complete candor and trust. We can only hope to broaden our own and each other's insights if we express ourselves freely and honestly. This concept of open communication lies at the very heart of the mutual

understanding and enlightenment we seek.

Though our goals are ambitious, there are many factors which give ample cause for optimism. Perhaps the most conclusive is the community of interests which all naval officers share. For each of us, the oceans of the world are our vocation and our adopted element.

This common experience, this common bond, I believe, can provide the catalyst for friendly, cooperative examination. With the unprecedented wealth of talent and experience mustered here, we may well shed fresh light on current problems and potential difficulties and perhaps even bring forth previously unrecognized issues of mutual interest.

In doing so, it is to be hoped that we will be led to examine the broadest policies and strategic concepts, not only

from a naval viewpoint, but also from economic, political, social, and even cultural aspects as well. Indeed, with such a wide spectrum of interests and background, it is difficult to see how our analysis can do otherwise.

In conclusion, allow me to say that our Naval War College and our Navy have a deep feeling of privilege and honor in hosting such a group of officers as are gathered here. And if all of our combined efforts to achieve new dimensions of understanding, cooperation, and friendship are successful, it is our sincere hope that the results of this first international Seapower Symposium will generate other, future meetings here or in your countries.

In any case, I believe the next few days have every promise of being rewarding, stimulating, and meaningful for all of us. Gentlemen, welcome aboard.

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I knew my ground, my material and my allies. If I met fifty checks I could yet see a fifty-first way to my object.

T.E. Lawrence, 1888-1935