

1954

Role of the Navy in a Future War

Robert B. Carney
U.S. Navy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Carney, Robert B. (1954) "Role of the Navy in a Future War," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 7 : No. 6 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol7/iss6/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE READER

The material contained herein is furnished to the individual addressee for his private information and education only. The frank remarks and personal opinions of many Naval War College guest lecturers are presented with the understanding that they will not be quoted; you are enjoined to respect their privacy. Under no circumstances will this material be republished or quoted publicly, as a whole or in part, without specific clearance in each instance with both the author and the Naval War College.

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW was established in 1948 by the Chief of Naval Personnel in order that officers of the service might receive some of the educational benefits of the resident students at the Naval War College. Distribution is in accordance with BUPERS Notice 1552 of 31 July 1953. It must be kept in the possession of the subscriber, or other officers eligible for subscription, and should be destroyed by burning when no longer required.

The thoughts and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the Navy Department or of the Naval War College.

MEMORANDUM

This is the final issue of the "NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW" for this academic year.

Effective with the next issue, September 1954 (Volume VII, No. 1), distribution of the "NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW" will be limited to the following:

1. Individual active duty officers of the Regular Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, of the rank of Lieutenant Commander (Major) and above.

2. Individual officers of the Navy and Marine Corps Ready and Standby reserves, and of the active Coast Guard reserve, of the rank of Lieutenant Commander (Major) and above.

3. Joint and service war colleges whose primary mission is the education of the above categories of officers and their Army and Air Force equivalents.

4. Active duty officers of the Army, Navy and Air Force who are current or were former staff members or resident students at the Naval War College.

5. Officers enrolled in Naval War College correspondence courses during the period of their enrollment.

6. Special addressees for which the President of the Naval War College may individually determine that distribution is in furtherance of the mission of the College.

Except in the cases of officers enrolled in correspondence courses, subscriptions will not be entered or renewed automatically. If you desire to continue your subscription for Volume VII, please complete the form on the reverse side of this page, and forward it promptly to the Head of the Correspondence Courses Department, Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island. Only one copy of the Naval War College Review will be sent to each addressee.

Date:

Head of the Correspondence Courses Department
Naval War College
Newport, Rhode Island

It is requested that Volume VII of the "NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW" be mailed to me at the address below. I am eligible pursuant to category #..... of the memorandum on the reverse of this application.

(Name, rank, service and designator. PRINT)

(Mailing address PRINT)

(Signature)

**YOUR PRESENT SUBSCRIPTION WILL BE
CONTINUED. THIS APPLICATION BLANK
NEED NOT BE SUBMITTED.**

**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
REVIEW**

**Issued Monthly
U. S. Naval War College
Newport, R. I.**

ROLE OF THE NAVY IN A FUTURE WAR

A lecture delivered
at the Naval War College
on 18 February 1954 by

*Admiral Robert B. Carney, U.S.N.,
Chief of Naval Operations*

The President of the Naval War College has asked me to speak on the Navy's role in future war. I accepted because the subject is vital, and because I felt a responsibility as the Chief of Naval Operations to offer my thoughts on this urgent and complex topic. Nevertheless, I accepted with no little trepidation for, in doing so, I am embarking on an extremely grave project — one which should have months of undivided attention in the preparation rather than the short time vouchsafed me.

A few words describing my own mental processes in organizing this discussion may help you, and others, to clarify their own analyses.

As I endeavored to bring the title into focus, the word "future" caught my attention. I realized that the boundaries of "future" must be delineated before I could even begin to sort out the factors and arrange them into any intelligible pattern. Tomorrow? 1956? 1960? 1964?

For the purposes of this discussion, it makes a great difference which segment of the future we contemplate. Fortunately, the problems of the very immediate future solve themselves: We simply use what we have to cope with the initial conditions imposed upon us by the aggressor.

Contemplating from the military standpoint the near and remote phases of the future, there is one cloudy stretch, the true significance of which too often is lost upon the planners.

And yet, its very murkiness provides the key to its importance. I refer to that period of time which follows the beginning of hostilities.

Not being aggressively inclined, we simply do not know when war will occur, nor what will precipitate it, nor what it will produce, nor how long it will last. The only truly sound conclusion to which we may come is that not being an aggressor nation we dare not entrust our safety to any single rigid and unalterable course of action; rather, we must — costly as it may be — be prepared for numerous contingencies. In short, even this first step — defining the meaning of “future” — counsels flexibility.

In reality the future is a moving thing like time. 1964 is the future to us, now; but in 1964, people will be thinking of the future just as we are today.

The point is this: At any given moment we will be in possession of certain demonstrated facts and proven techniques and equipment, but will be groping into the future in search of improvement and progress. We can expect the future to present new factors to the equation only in the sense that the dawn is always new. That concept is not just a bit of philosophizing; it is important because it is subject to translation into terms of budgets and hardware and it provides a fundamental key to military business.

As far as the Navy is concerned, the bulk of the fleet will always be of the present and the proven past, spiced up with a leaven of the things to come. That fact does not shackle our imaginations but it will always serve to impose some physical limitations on our operational planning.

So much for the “future” per se. Let us now examine some other factors in our effort to see what the Navy's role would be, should we be forced to defend ourselves.

The title raises another pregnant question: What sort of war do we have in mind? If we are honest with ourselves, we will acknowledge that there are big wars, little wars, general wars, localized wars, Marquis of Queensbury wars, and savage ruthless wars; atomic wars and, perhaps, non-atomic wars. What can we expect? What can we count on to guide us in our planning? Again, if we are honest with ourselves, and have the wit to see the possibilities for varied political contingencies, we will conclude that we cannot say, for sure, just what kind of conflict the next international crisis might precipitate.

If the answer is "Atoms!", that is one thing. Were the criterion to be "No Atoms!", we are militarily right back where we started.

I cannot, nor can anyone else, forecast the blueprint for an ultimate show-down of the nations now in ideological conflict. It is entirely conceivable that we might see a limited use of atomic weapons. We might see, and probably will see, a continuation of the so-called brush fires. Or — we might see, as has so far been the case with chemical and bacteriological warfare, a nuclear stalemate with both sides refraining for fear of retaliation.

Confronted with great uncertainty in this respect, I see no alternative but to hedge our strategic bets, ready to rush into the future, but also prepared to meet, and rely on, the methods of the recent past.

So, here appears to be another useful clue and one which bears out the idea born of our attempt to define the meaning of "future." Consequently, as another general conclusion, I would say that something new and something old are both needed in the military locker. Obviously, no more specific conclusions as to forces and weapons would be possible for the simple reason that we can not pin-point all possible threats, politically or geographically. We can only say that the current threat is posed by the communistic bloc and go on from there.

Whereas I am working — not too deviously, I hope — toward conclusions concerning the Navy, it must be borne in mind that the Navy is but one component of our armed strength; it must be remembered that military power is but one element of national strength. And global thinking forces us to recall that American strength is but one element — albeit a powerful one — of allied power. I shall not attempt to elaborate here, but I will ask you to keep in sight the fact that before we can get down to U. S. Naval brass tacks, there must be a prior consideration of the roles and missions of the United States in the free-world scheme of things. Having defined our national role, we then fit together the economic, military, and other elements of our national strength and come up with a military strategy that will best support our national aims. Within the framework of a national military posture are dovetailed the roles, missions and tasks of the individual services.

The Navy's place in the great design will depend in part on the measures our side intends to initiate, and will also be powerfully influenced by the capabilities and intentions of potential enemies as we understand them. The size of our naval forces, and their composition will stem from the specific jobs to be done if we are to enjoy the seas' blessings and deny them to our adversaries. Certain it is that we want a Navy which can make a major contribution to projecting American power overseas and which can be depended on to hamstring any enemy effort to project his own strength in our direction via the watery highways and help to guard the ocean airways.

This sort of thinking, in actual practice, evolves into a series of steps which apply the tests of feasibility against the desiderata — looking into the purse of resources to see how far we can indulge our strategic appetite. This is really the way a "New Look" evolves.

The approach to the current United States New Look has been just such a process of integrated analysis, with every pre-

dictable factor considered, and every responsible element of Government participating in the deliberations. Even public opinion has been in the act, for the public has evinced a keen interest in the New Look and it is a constant topic of public discussion.

This New Look will be reflected, in a practical way, in force levels and budgetary support; and these, in turn, will be worked out on the basis of acknowledged roles, missions, and responsibilities of the several services. The roles, missions, and responsibilities are, in themselves, formulae to cope with the strength and assumed intent of potentially unfriendly powers, and to permit our own side to initiate measures in support of our own objectives.

Stated in its simplest terms, the Navy's traditional job has been, and still is, to gain and maintain control of the seas. More specifically, the U. S. Navy in conjunction with allied naval forces must exercise positive control over those sea areas needed for our own uses and those other sea areas of critical importance to the enemy. The Navy will also have collateral tasks in support of the Armies and Air Forces, and these additional responsibilities may be expected to increase with the Navy's ever-increasing range of tactical influence.

By "sea," we no longer mean the surface of the sea. The air above the sea, and the darkest depths below the surface, are now part and parcel of a vast 3-D strategic area. Both offensively and defensively our operations are being projected farther above the surface, and farther below it. Strategic air attacks may approach their targets from seaward; submarines will stealthily approach the coasts to launch deadly missiles. Missiles of all sorts will be triggered to their assault or defensive missions; some will carry atomic war-heads. And mark you!—The tidal wave of nuclear propulsion, although still barely visible, is rolling in; it is as surely building to crescendo as was the inevitable cracking of the atom itself. All of these things not only complicate but increase the urgency of the sea-controlling job.

And make no mistake: The sea still is, and for the farthest foreseeable future will be, the avenue for the movement of the vast majority of the things and stuff and men that must be shuttled around in the prosecution of a war, and for the feeding of insatiable war industries.

The requirements of sea transport are not always understood, but an examination of the list of critical materials which our industry must seek from abroad would bring us to some gloomy conclusions if we thought the Navy could not keep the sea lanes open. Were we or our suppliers to be completely blockaded, the best we could hope for would be perilous isolation.

And if this is a matter of such importance to this fabulously endowed country, what of England and Japan? What of the Mediterranean countries with their willing and intelligent man power and their impoverished natural resources? All of the spirit and passion for freedom of such allies would avail little, if they were to be throttled by the enemy at sea. This is a very real threat which takes an important place in any New Look in search of the optimum strategy.

Our over-all strategy — the plan for making optimum use of available resources — is strongly influenced by our appraisal of the capabilities and intentions of potential enemies. Our Navy thinking must take Russian naval thinking into account. Russian ground strength has long held our attention, and was in no small measure responsible for that urge for collective security which brought about the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. More recently, Soviet nuclear achievements have grabbed the stage and precipitated much sober thought — and a measure of hysteria. In the meantime there has been another manifestation of major Soviet policy which has been eclipsed in the public thinking by these developments, but it is a development which merits our very serious consideration. I refer to Russia's emergence as a maritime power.

Unobtrusively, and without fanfare, she appears on the stage as the second strongest naval power in terms of numbers of ships in commission — second only to the United States. She is flooding the shipyards of our allies with orders for merchant tonnage and she is building formidable combatant types in her own plants. She has recognized the importance of naval aviation and is improving that arm of sea strength. At present, in keeping with her geographical position and basic naval policy, her naval air-arm is land-based, but we cannot exclude the possibility that she may at some future time build aircraft carriers.

Russia's Navy is the one Soviet service that is more heavily manned today than during World War II.

These are the unmistakable signs that portend a steadfast Soviet determination to make a bid for a powerful place on the seas. Our cue is obvious; our own forces must be tailored, equipped, and trained to meet the challenge if need arises — and meet it successfully and decisively.

For our primary business of bossing the oceans in time of war, I see our operations including the old, savage, endless, nerve-testing campaign against the enemy submarine with our escorts plodding around the convoys and our Hunter-Killer groups employing every new device and weapon and technique. I see massive attacks on enemy bases and threatening air fields. I see ships and planes on vigilance patrols to warn of impending air attack on our shores and to shoot down the planes and missiles that threaten. I see the old, grim mine warfare, though the mines and countermeasures may take new forms.

Guns, with their limited ranges, will become secondary to a family of swift and implacable missiles.

Electronics will perform lightning calculations for attackers — and electronics battles will be waged between opponents, measure and countermeasure — momentary success, frequent frustration.

The Navy will respond to calls for support in the strategic air struggle. It will be prepared to supply the Army and to give some direct air support to the troops.

The Fleet Marine Force will provide a powerful and highly-specialized mobile striking force to seize beachheads and to outflank enemy's line of communications, a ready-poised element of the self-contained naval team, which is conceived, equipped, trained, and directed by a single great weapons-system understanding and dedicated to gaining and keeping mastery of the seas — the Navy.

These things we can forecast on the basis of our own objectives and our assumptions as to the capabilities and intentions of possible enemies. The crystal ball hints of other things but does not reveal them: The developments that would come about after the die of war is cast. About all we can predict of them is that they will prove to be merely new tools for the immutable fundamental role.

For example, the next war might start with an aggressive act of sufficient magnitude to warrant prompt, large-scale retaliation. Then, would follow a period when both sides would pick up the pieces, dust off the atomic residue, and make a re-estimate of the situation which might well result in both sides settling down to a struggle chiefly involving the old conventional weapons. Regardless of how the war is fought, of one thing I am certain: It will end on the ground, politically and economically, even if not by frontal assault. Guerilla bands, armed with bamboo spears may stalk each other across the remaining ashes. But, and of this I am certain also, they won't walk on the water.

Actually, it is safe to say that future war will not change the Navy's basic role in the pattern of national defense. The campaign may be waged at a hitherto undreamed-of tempo; the destruction may dwarf all of the experiences of history; new and distant targets will come within reach; there will be crying need for electronics to supplement the capabilities of our inadequate

human mental processes; there will be a greater inter-play and mutual dependence among the services and between allied forces. But it will be the old familiar job of controlling the sea for our own use and denying it to the enemy.

Today, new concepts of war are being advanced as people ponder the effects of our new invention.

New concepts are often in conflict with time-tested procedures; some zealots will oppose new concepts — others will religiously oppose everything else. Special applications often are mistaken for new principles. Common sense shows that balance is needed and my earlier remarks about the new and the old give a good clue as to the nature of that balance at any given moment. We must keep a watchful eye on both extreme-ism and entrenched conservatism. Time moves, and we must move with it — and even ahead of it if possible; but time's applicable lessons should not be junked.

The factors bearing on grand strategy are constantly changing with the changing fortunes and trends of nations; strategic conclusions must be periodically reviewed. Therefore, strategy itself is a fluid thing, shifting under the influence of the circumstances of the times. The principles of war (the implementation of strategy) are constant, but strategy itself changes.

Changes in strategy will induce changes in emphasis with respect to the tasks of the several services, but the fundamental roles and missions are far less subject to change. Were war of serious proportions to be thrust upon us in the near future, the role of the Navy under the New Look strategy would be identical in most respects to its assigned job in World War II; there would, however, be variations from the exact pattern of operations of the past. For example:

We must be prepared to utilize atomic weapons on
naval missions;

We must be ready to assist and support our sister services in atomic operations;

We must be prepared to utilize either atomic or conventional methods, depending on the way the conflict develops;

We must be ready to operate in conjunction with our NATO partners and in the forces of other associated nations.

None of those things are departures from our fundamental role; they are new, true; but they are merely adaptations of new things to old and unchanging principles.

All factors taken into account — the increased swiftness of passing world events, the increased emphasis in Soviet maritime growth, the future trends of sea utilization, the potentialities of nuclear propulsion, and the historic dependence of the world on sea communications — I am convinced that sea power is on the threshold of greater significance than ever before.

Here, a word of warning is very much in order. Allied sea supremacy is not an automatically assured fact. That depends on our composite efforts, our wisdom and our determination. Sea supremacy, like the sea itself, is something that the sailor — and his country — must never take for granted.

If you think back for a moment concerning the points I have made, you will be impressed with the staggering and increasing complexity of naval warfare; which raises an extremely important question. What sort of men will plan these forces? What sort of men will fight these complicated ships and weapons? Even a push button must be pushed and it will still require intelligence to estimate P-moment — it will still take disciplined team-work to prepare everything to respond to the push — it may require even more guts and discipline than ever before to fight the battles of the future.

One thing is certain: No push button will produce leadership, loyalty, quality, courage, character; and those are the essential ingredients of this weapons-system which we call the Navy, no matter what the future may bring.

Certainly one of the most important roles of the Navy — in my opinion, **THE MOST** important — in peace and in war, is the developing of people who will be equal to the exacting requirements of peace-time preparation and to the gruelling ordeals of a war that may be worse than anything we have yet experienced.

There is much that the Navy can do in this respect on its own initiative. There is also much to be done which can only be accomplished with the help of the Government and the people from whom the Government derives its powers — and its mandates.

The staggering complexity of modern warfare, to which I just referred, poses another problem with respect to the people who man our Navy. Today, no one man can master all of the tactics, techniques, capabilities, and workings of the ships and planes and weapons and equipment of the Navy; a mere general understanding is no mean achievement. The moral is clear: Decentralization to indoctrinated and trusted subordinates is mandatory. And there is an equally apparent corollary: A large measure of specialization is inevitable and the specialists must be accorded worthy goals within their specialties. Mark those points well, for the writing is on the wall and if we fail to discern its meaning, the Navy will suffer, and will surely fall behind the times.

As an approach to the future, I would strongly urge an open-minded outlook with the hatch always cracked for the acceptance of new and sound ideas. I would caution against the danger of "Compartmented mentality," compartmented either in the sense of thinking of military power in terms of any single facet, or in the sense of thinking of war as it used to be. This

sort of thinking is perhaps as great a threat to the security of the United States as the ponderous capabilities of the Soviet Union. The naval officer should never forget the use of troops, planes, military formations ashore, and fleets deployed at sea. I cannot conceive of a major military campaign for the future that would not involve full participation of all the services, and all of the capabilities of each, all closely interwoven in the fabric of total national

Admiral Carney was Chief of Staff and Aide to Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., Commander of the South Pacific Force, from July 1943 to June 1945, after which he was assigned to the staff of the Commander of the Third Fleet in the same capacity. In November 1944 he received the Navy Cross "for extraordinary heroism" in operations against enemy forces during the Battle for Leyte Gulf (23-26 October) in the invasion of the Philippines. On 30 August 1945 Admiral Carney formally accepted the surrender of Yokosuka, Japan's second largest naval base, at the entrance to Tokyo Bay. Ordered to duty in February 1946 as Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Logistics) at the Navy Department, Admiral Carney five months later assumed the duties of Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Logistics and continued in that capacity until 1950.

Aboard the battleship MISSOURI on 1 April 1950, Admiral Carney took over formal command of the Second Task Fleet, in the Atlantic. Five months later he was designated to succeed Admiral Richard L. Conolly as Commander in Chief of the United States Naval Forces in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean. He assumed his new duties on November 1 at the United States Naval Headquarters in London. On 18 June of 1951 General Eisenhower announced the appointment of Admiral Carney as Commander in Chief of Allied Forces in Southern Europe and of the Allied Naval Forces in Southern Europe. He continued to fill these three important posts simultaneously until he assumed his present position as Chief of Naval operations on 17 August 1953.