

A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower – A New Maritime Era

A Successful Strategy and a Historic First

The United States Navy's latest maritime strategy document, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* delivers the first unified maritime strategy for the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. Containing a near-comprehensive framework, the sea services have a governing document to meet a myriad of maritime challenges in the littorals and on the high seas. This strategy codifies current and evolving mission requirements and incorporates previous governing documents discussing the Navy's use of seapower. The sea services' longstanding missions of power projection and deterrence, developing stronger ties with foreign navies, and maintaining the ability to deploy and respond quickly and decisively in a time of crisis remain hallmark. The sea services most pressing challenge will be creating and maintaining a seamless and fully integrated maritime force with the appropriate force structure to respond to a broad range of maritime challenges.

A Framework for Success

Navy Challenges

Current navy ship construction plans call for a 313-ship fleet. The acquisition of ships and craft needed to meet the collective requirements of the maritime strategy will be a significant challenge for the sea services leadership for decades to come. Over the long term, the navy's long-range shipbuilding plan does not support a fleet of this size and based on its construction plan, the navy will not attain its 313-ship goal. Failures within the Navy to define, fund, and procure ships and associated systems has resulted in cost over-runs, delays, and reduction of vessel procurement rates. Despite the recent increase in ship construction funding in the 2008 defense budget, ongoing programs like the Littoral Combat Ship, the Zumwalt Class Destroyer and the Future Cruiser programs will likely face cost overruns and procurement delays over the long term. The Congressional Budget Office expects the Navy to build an average of 9.8 ships per year for a total of 294 ships over a 30 year period at an average cost of \$22.7 billion a year. The number of ships in the fleet will peak at 326 in 2020 and by 2031 the fleet is expected to decline to 293 ships before increasing to 309 at the end of the 30 year period.

Based on the current composition of the fleet, the Navy will be challenged to adequately support the humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and stabilization and reconstruction missions without sacrificing other operational requirements and fleet training. Marine Corps leadership has lobbied for more amphibious ships indicating the need for at least 33 ships to meet operational requirements and contingencies. As amphibious ships will likely be the primary force to take on these missions, the Navy will need to change its shipbuilding plan as well as plans for fitting and manning ships to support these missions and meet the goal of a 313-ship fleet. To further compound the problem, the 313-ship plan calls for 31 amphibious ships organized around 9 Expeditionary Strike Groups; a reduction of 3 strike groups during the next decade. In spite of this reduction, the future

amphibious lift capability of the Wasp class amphibious assault ships and the LHA-6 program compared to the fleet operational Wasp/Tarawa classes deliver no significant improvement in amphibious lift. Surface combatants are not tailored to support these types of missions and at best their capabilities are gap-filler until amphibious and support ships are in place. In addition, with only two hospital ships in the fleet, the Navy may have to find ways to deliver medical capable ships for disaster response.

Coast Guard Challenges

The Coast Guard has its own difficulties with ship procurement and has made several important changes to get back to its traditional role of management and oversight of its shipbuilding programs. With an increased role in Homeland Security, the Coast Guard is trying to modernize and update its own forces. Its Deepwater Program, the re-capitalization of all surface and air units that operate more than 50 miles offshore, has received steady funding increases and may be complete ahead of schedule, saving scarce procurement dollars. In addition, the small craft forces are also being re-capitalized and expanded. Congress has made it a priority to replace the Coast Guard's aging fleet of 88 cutters and nearly 200 planes over the next 20 years, with many cutters already in need of replacement.

A New Maritime Era

The Navy and her sister services are unmatched; however the qualitative and technological advantages the sea services currently enjoy are slowly dwindling. As most of the world's navies maintain a regional or coastal naval force, only a handful of the world's navies possess the capability for blue water operations or are able to maintain a long-term regional presence. China's armed forces with its double-digit defense spending increases over the past two decades is moving from a land-centric construct to a qualitative naval-centric force with advanced weaponry and sensors. Countries with procurement dollars are also buying ultra quiet diesel submarines with air-independent propulsion and advanced surface-to-surface missile systems, as well as multi-role surface combatants with advanced weapons and sensors. Many regional navies learned a harsh lesson from the Indian Ocean tsunamis in 2004 and are now acquiring new amphibious lift capabilities to support potential disaster relief and also project power ashore.

The new maritime strategy portrays a new maritime era and that sea power is even more crucial for the 21st century. From an operational point of view, it draws the three sea services closer together; yet the sea services will have to collectively modernize the fleet and determine what to acquire, build, and maintain to expand their core operational capabilities. As the sea services broaden their relationships with foreign navies, systems and operations integration will be a key component to international engagement and operational success. The sea services will have a tremendous challenge to shore up their ship procurement programs and acquire the right blend of platforms possessing the appropriate capabilities as they take the lead to respond to a broad range of global maritime challenges.