

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. It is an honor and pleasure to be invited back to RUSI to discuss seapower matters. My presence here is the result of an offhand comment I made to Lee Willett a month or so back when he was in Newport attending a piracy conference. I opined that the emerging nature of the international naval effort in the Gulf of Aden revealed the existence of a global seapower infrastructure. This notion seemed to pique Lee's interest, and he invited me here to speak on it. Neatly hoisted on my own petard, I now had to think through what I actually meant and whether there really was such a thing. My conclusion after some study and consultation with colleagues and certain US Navy brass is that yes, indeed, there is an infrastructure out there, and conceptualizing the collection of physical and intangible elements as a seapower infrastructure might be of some utility to the Royal Navy and others as they grapple with strategies and plans for the future.

Being a good US Naval War College professor, I usually insert into my classes some quote by Clausewitz or Mahan to illustrate some esoteric point or stimulate discussion. This time, I will use one by a noted British Naval writer, Sir Halford MacKinder (you probably thought I was going to say Corbett). Most famous for his geopolitical theorizing on the potential

power of the Eurasian heartland, in 1914 he said the following in a book on the geography of Britain and its surrounding seas: “The unity of the ocean is the simple physical fact underlying the dominant value of sea-power in the modern globe-wide world.” On the surface (no pun intended), this seems almost self-evident and trite, but if one digs a little deeper it becomes clear that there is deep (again, no pun intended) geopolitical insight that underlies this statement. I don’t have time to explore all the implications, but for my purposes today, I will focus on the unity part of MacKinder’s sentence. In my view, seapower can only be truly understood on a global basis, and regardless of whether a navy is large or small, coastal or oceanic, it must think globally to best structure itself to serve its parent nation.

Moving beyond MacKinder’s simple geographic fact, are there reasons for navies to think globally? In my view there are many, but three come to mind right away. First, historically, the big struggles in history, at least since Napoleonic times, have been won by the nation that has combined naval supremacy with a network of allies and trading partners. I call this condition the exterior global position and I regret I do not have time to explore it more here, but if you look at a globe and consider the geography

of conflict from Napoleon's rise to the end of the Cold War, you will quickly see what I mean. Second, since the commercial shipping enterprises of even land-locked nations are global in nature, navies need to match their thinking, if not their physical mobility, to the character of their nation's commercial enterprise. This is very Mahanian thinking. Third, given the nature of today's terrorist threat, global thinking is necessary to prevent or sew up the maritime security seams.

But thinking globally seems neither easy nor natural for most nations and navies. The world is a big place, and there is a lot going on. It's hard for governments and their navies to generate the psychic bandwidth to maintain an even level of situational awareness and interest in all continents and all seas. Then there is the matter of bureaucratic convenience. What foreign ministry is not organized by region? Certainly the US unified command structure is regionalized both in terms of planning and command and control. Of course, when organizations are sectioned off into regional divisions, cylinders of excellence appear, and it's easy for the global view to disappear. Finally, human nature being what it is, we tend to focus on the most urgent threat, which most frequently emanates from one particular geographic region.

So, how does an organization achieve a global perspective? One way has been to have it forced on us by the existence of a global threat. The Soviet Union provided a convenient catalyst for global thinking in the Cold War, and it precipitated an inherently maritime and global grand strategy of containment. Of course that threat disappeared by 1991, and without any other catalyst, American grand strategic and naval thinking devolved into a fragmented region by region approach. Only recently have we conjured another catalyst for global thinking, this time via our maritime strategy development project. It is the global system of commerce and security. In our big strategy wargame in 2006, the “aha!” moment was when we realized that all nations, including the so-called rogues, had a stake in the effective functioning of this system. Subsequently, we found that thinking in terms of defending the global system, preventing war among major powers being a principal measure, offered us a useful framework for making sense of the various activities the US Navy was contemplating and putting them into some coherent whole. So what about the global seapower infrastructure that is the subject of my talk?

Let's start by examining what's going on in the Gulf of Aden. Remember the hand-wringing that went on in some circles when the Chinese announced they were going to send a small naval squadron to the Gulf? They were expanding, they were pushing out and who knew what insidious intent was behind the deployment. What happened? Does anyone care now? What did the Chinese do? They got there and although they had an initial idea that they would operate in splendid isolation, they quickly realized they had to at least communicate. One of their sailors had a hot mail account and sent an e-mail to someone in our MOC in Bahrain for forwarding to our ships in the Gulf. Communications were established and commanders invited each other to lunch. I heard that at one point the Chinese ran out of fruit and didn't know how to get more, so they asked us. We knew how, and helped them out. Most recently, they came out and suggested that we all cooperate to establish a zone defense as a way to overcome the big sea little pirate ship problem. What happened? The same thing as what happened to the Russians, Japanese, Nato, Singaporeans and Iranians that have shown up – they fell in on an existing infrastructure of sea power that girdles the globe now – a consequence of globalization I suppose.

In the Gulf of Aden there is a convenient confluence of interest among all the nations represented by warships in the Gulf. Nobody wants to go ashore in Somalia but everyone wants to be seen as doing something about piracy. It turns out that there is a framework for all the navies to operate within that is global, informal and loosely coupled and in the process of coalescing. This is why the Chinese, Russian, NATO and other naval forces have virtually disappeared in the Gulf – they are simply part of the system and are leveraging in common the infrastructure that exists.

So what is this infrastructure? It has commercial and naval, physical and intangible elements. First the physical – there is GPS, SATCOM and internet available so that warships never have to get lost and can stay connected to home, other navies and indeed the world. In addition, the US Navy has, since World War II, maintained a globe-girdling logistics system that operates 24/7/365. It consists of bases, a naval train, and a web of husbanding contracts among other things. It's always there, ready to be used – by almost any navy that wants to. In addition, the USN is building a global network of Maritime Operations Centers that are internationally staffed. We have gone far beyond the matter of search and rescue to really a web of logistic and information capability to support all manner of naval, and joint operations, both US and international.

There are also intangible elements to the infrastructure. Of course there is the UN Law of the Sea and a number of other international agreements that provide a framework for operations, as well as governing organizations like the IMO. But there is also the strategic context. By that I mean that there is an underlying reason that Chinese warships can proceed unmolested to the Gulf of Aden. Since 1805, with the brief exception of World War II, one nation has had command of the seas. Up to World War II it was Great Britain, and since it has been the United States. Command of the Seas by a liberal trading nation makes the emergence of a global seapower infrastructure possible, and free-riding on this condition, as the US did in the most of the 19th Century, is a positive good. Additionally, the continual deployments of the US Navy, Royal Navy and others during the Cold War conditioned the world to the presence of warships in the littorals. This conditioning adds to the freedom of movement of the warships of all nations, again contributing to the emergence of a global seapower infrastructure.

I briefly mentioned the exterior position, but it seems we have gone beyond that, which was based on alliances, to a system. Alliances, even broad ones, are inherently exclusive. The emerging global seapower

infrastructure system is inclusive. There is no membership fee – you just show up. This is true for anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden just as it was true for the tsunami relief operations in 2004/2005.

It may also be the case that smaller navies have more incentive to deploy out of their normal operating areas than previously, and the PLAN deployment to the Gulf of Aden may be more a symptom of this general trend than a particular geopolitical statement on the part of Chinese leaders. Whether combating piracy, providing disaster relief, conducting humanitarian assistance, or interdicting smuggling of various types the mission structure of not only the US maritime strategy but of world navies in general is increasingly defensive. This makes it easier for navies of all stripes to engage in cooperative projects, and the increasing awareness of how problems like piracy in the Gulf of Aden can affect countries distant from that area provides incentive to get involved in collective efforts. So the prospect for more frequent small navy out of area deployments appears to be increasing, raising in turn the importance of the global seapower infrastructure.

All of this may seem a bit fuzzy, and I agree that it is more a way of looking at things than it is a substantive system that is out there. But it is perhaps more real for all of that. If recognized as an actual element of the current global strategic environment it can become a useful planning factor for navies. It provides considerable freedom of movement, an essential element of naval mobility. It offers the potential for smaller navies to undertake global naval operations without the need for entangling alliances or formal agreements. One can easily envision achieving interoperability and cooperation with little in the way of commitment. It also offers the potential for specialization. A navy could ask itself what its nation's key systemic interests are, and how it can help protect them. In this context it can ask what capabilities it does not need if it leverages the global seapower infrastructure. In other words, by recognizing this infrastructure as a strategic planning factor, a navy could retain or achieve more global reach and influence than if it ignored it.

I will close by making the well-worn observation that when seapower is hitting on all cylinders it is invisible, which makes obtaining continued public support problematic. Certainly those of us who helped develop the current US maritime strategy were cognizant of this problem as the strategy started

taking hits from beltway pundits who complain that it does not make them “feel our pain.” – that is, the strategy does not wave threats in the public’s face, nor does it call for a particular force structure. It is a strategy that leverages the elements of the global seapower infrastructure to make sure seapower remains as invisible as possible – a systemic function that operates continuously to support the global system. I would say that perhaps the strongest argument for public support is that if you don’t use it, i.e. leverage the infrastructure and thereby increase national prominence as a good global citizen, then you will lose it – the “it” being the ability to be a player and have influence. The infrastructure I have described is a kind of strategic force multiplier for navies, and offers almost all nations an opportunity to be part of the global security picture.

Thank you for your kind attention.