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## THE NEW U.S. MARITIME STRATEGY SURFACES

*Lu Rude*

In order to cope with threats and safeguard U.S. interests, the new U.S. maritime strategy puts forward six major missions for sea power: deploy decisive sea power in a forward position in limited conflicts of regional scale; deter war between major powers; win wars for the nation; safeguard homeland security from long-distance; promote and maintain cooperative relationships with more international partners; and prevent or eliminate regional destruction before it affects the international system. To accomplish these six missions, U.S. sea power must possess the corresponding six core capabilities, including the capability to be in a forward position (present global deployment), deterrence capability, sea control capability, force projection capability, the capability to safeguard public order at sea, and humanitarian assistance and disaster response capability.

### SPECIAL TEXT FOR THIS PAGE

*A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, the latest put forward by the United States, represents the first major revision of [U.S.] maritime strategy in twenty years. The 1986 Maritime Strategy was essentially a Cold War era strategy with “war as the nucleus,” mainly for establishing sea supremacy. The objective was global confrontation with the Soviet Navy. Obviously, with the Soviet Union’s disintegration and the Soviet Navy’s decline, the “1986 edition” of the U.S. maritime strategy was already obsolete. Faced with the new international situation of counterterrorism following the “9/11” incident and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the rapid rise of developing nations and the formation of a multipolar world, [and] as a result of over two years of debate and discussion by the U.S. Navy’s theoretical circle, the “2007 edition” of the maritime strategy, which brandishes the great banner of “international cooperation” and a plausible new face, was finally issued.

*A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* is composed of six sections: introduction, challenges for the new era, maritime strategic concepts, strategic implementation, tasks prioritized for implementation, and conclusion. This essay gives a brief analysis to offer insights into the new trends of the U.S. Navy.

### **A DUALITY OF THE ANGLE OF VIEW: PREVENTING AND WINNING WAR ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT**

In the introduction to *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, there is a conspicuous new viewpoint: it is written unequivocally that “Preventing and Winning War Are Equally Important.” In the past, the U.S. Navy’s strategy emphasized “gain the initiative by striking first” and “win by war,” and it was all about warfare preparations and operations planning. The new strategy believes that “maritime power should both be devoted to winning wars decisively, and to increasing war prevention capability,” thus attaching importance to containing war before it occurs. Elevating war prevention to the same strategic status of importance as winning war in military theory represents a major change in the U.S. naval strategy. This is a reaffirmation of the internationally and universally recognized “maritime military operations other than war.” It can be foreseen that henceforth the international cooperation and noncombat use of navies will increase. This will become a new common bright point for activities at sea by the world’s navies.

### **AN ENTIRELY NEW WAY OF THINKING: MARITIME INTERESTS CANNOT BE DICTATED BY ONE COUNTRY**

*A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* describes the current and future threats facing the United States as “the continuous increase of transnational actors, rogue states, proliferation of weapon technologies and information, and natural disasters.” “The vast majority of the world’s population lives within several hundred kilometers from the sea. This necessitates an entirely new way of thinking about the role of maritime power.” Following the implementation of *The U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea*, world oceanic trends have experienced a great change, and the oceans have become a new domain for rivalry. The United States recognized that “no one country alone has sufficient resources to guarantee the security of the entire maritime space.” Therefore, this strategy “appeals to every government, non-governmental organization, international organization and private institution to develop partnership relationships based on common interests to address the frequently occurring new threats.”

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. strategic goals were confused for a while. Following the “9/11” incident, however, the United States has regained its sense, “enemies can very well use unconventional warfare to win over America’s superior military strength.” This has forced the United States to rethink its maritime strategy and realize that the U.S. homeland and global strategic interests were no longer threatened by a fixed strategic opponent. Rather, the United States faces a multitude of potential threats.

The United States is the promoter of unipolarity, all along relying on its powerful naval fleets to dominate the seas and safeguard America's own interests. But the tremendous change in the international system makes it begin to think reasonably that the present maritime issues affect each nation's interests, that no

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海军是战略地区的核心力量。美国海军继续充当美国全球战略的急先锋与主力军。

*The Navy is the core force in strategic regions. The U.S. Navy continues to serve as the daring vanguard and main force of U.S. global strategy.*

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one country can dominate, and that all forces must be mobilized in the world to jointly safeguard the "common interests" at sea. *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* clearly proposes that "collective security activities will be conducted to address common threats and assemble common interests in an open and multipolar world, and maritime power will be used to build confidence and mutual trust among nations." It is important to note that this is the first time that U.S. official writings have put forward [the concept of] a transition to multipolarity and the construction of "cooperative partnerships" based on maritime common interests.

In the section on strategy implementation, the new maritime strategy has clear differences from the "1986 edition," placing the utmost emphasis on "war prevention through cooperation in each region, and not waiting for war to break out to win it. Particularly when confronting the threat of terrorism, we must use forward deployed forces to stop terrorism as far away from the U.S. coastline as possible, thus guaranteeing the absolute security of the U.S. homeland."

One can see that the new U.S. maritime strategy emphasizes "military software" such as "humanitarian rescue missions and improving cooperative relations between the United States and every country," thus attempting to achieve the goals of preventing war and maintaining peace. If it can be achieved, this is a rational choice suitable for the present international circumstances. All countries have a great need to explore the new thinking of developing mutual assistance and common prosperity to remove divergences and jointly safeguard the peace of the oceans. This is also the international obligation of "peaceful use of the oceans" and "joint management of the oceans" advocated in the *U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea*.

This could be a major change in the U.S. military's maritime strategy. It must receive the affirmation of all the world's nations.

#### **STRATEGIC FOCUS: SHIFT FROM THE ATLANTIC TO THE PACIFIC**

*A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* states: from now on, U.S. military strength will be concentrated in "areas where tension escalates, or in regions in which we hope to demonstrate to friendly nations and allies the U.S.

resolve to maintain stability, and regions where the U.S. realizes its obligations to its allies.” “The U.S. will continue to deploy strong operational power in the Western Pacific, and the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, to safeguard U.S. and allied interests and to deter potential competitors.” In fact, the U.S. Secretary of the Navy declared: the new strategy “not only discusses things that we want to do, we have already begun to do some of these things,” such as having already deployed forces in these two regions of strategic importance.

The Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea are the “energy lifelines,” and they constitute a strategic thoroughfare that America’s global strategy must guarantee. The Middle East is a “powder keg,” and these seas were the maritime battlegrounds of the Iran-Iraq War, the Iraq “War to Overthrow Saddam” and the Afghan War. Moreover, these are regions in which several countries possess nuclear weapons and the danger of nuclear proliferation exists. By setting up pointed defenses and carrying out strategic deployment, the United States is prepared to act at any time and to intervene.

The Western Pacific is the area of most intense competition among nations for maritime sovereignty. It is also a region that has the highest concentration and fastest growth in terms of the world’s naval forces. Some Asian countries are rising rapidly, have abundant economic and technological strength, and possess nuclear weapons or the capability to develop them; they will directly influence and challenge American hegemony. Moreover, Asia is the region in which the United States has concluded and signed the highest number of defense treaties, an important sea area in which the United States has implemented island chain defense. Therefore, according to the new U.S. strategy, the Western Pacific is determined to be “a region of high tension” where the United States has the responsibility to “carry out treaty obligations” to its allies and to “contain potential strategic competitors.”

Consequently, the United States not only increases its military strength on the Japanese mainland and in the Ryukyu Islands, it also dispatches carrier battle groups to cruise around in a heightened state of war readiness. For “humanitarian objectives” and “the requirements of international cooperation,” the Western Pacific is the sea area where the U.S. military conducts the largest and most frequent maritime exercises with its allies. Such frequent transnational and multinational maritime military exercises were not possible more than a decade ago, and this is the evidence that the new U.S. maritime strategy has already been put into effect.

## FORWARD DEPLOYMENT: STRATEGY TO DOMINATE THE OCEAN CAN BE TRACED TO THE SAME ORIGIN

*A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* believes: major changes have taken place in the global strategic environment, and the United States faces threats dispersed all over the world. Therefore, it is necessary to give full play to the “expeditionary” and “multi-role” characteristics of sea power, and adopt globally “dispersed deployment to defend the homeland and U.S. citizens, and promote our interests on a global scale.”

Obviously, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* has not changed the [U.S.] strategic goal of dominating the world’s oceans. The United States still attempts to rely on its formidable sea power to control the world’s oceans, carry

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out global deployments, [and] continue to brandish military force to “deter wars between great powers,” thus maintaining its domination of the world’s oceans. The new maritime strategy pointedly emphasizes “forward deployment” and seeks to implement “expeditionary” and “multi-role” [capabilities], thus striving to keep the battlefield far away from the American homeland so that U.S. security and interests can be realized.

Over the course of the “9/11” incident and the Afghan and Iraq wars, from international counterterrorism operations the U.S. Navy recognized that the terror wars it confronted were completely different from traditional wars. There was uncertainty concerning the combat opponents, the areas of operations, the methods of engagement, and the triggering events. There were neither clear boundary lines between countries and regions nor conventional precursors of war. The “Chief planner” of U.S. military strategy, [former] Assistant Secretary of Defense Andrew Hoehn, believes: “terrorism has unprecedented destructiveness, and it travels and connects various continents and regions. To deal with it, you must wage a global war.” As a result, “counterterrorism” war must use the “great dragnet” of international cooperation for global defense.

The new U.S. maritime strategic concept holds that even if a regional war is limited, it is still very difficult to achieve complete victory without international support, so only through international cooperation can “terror war” be prevented and peace obtained. The new strategic concept integrates such clauses as “promoting and maintaining cooperative relations with more international partners,” and asserts that “emphasis will be placed on

conflict prevention through humanitarian rescue and assistance operations and strengthening international cooperation.” It emphasizes that preventing war is as important as preventing war from expanding, and that preventing war from expanding requires international cooperation, so as to avoid affecting the global system and American interests. This is a transformation that has caught people’s attention.

In objectively analyzing the U.S. *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, one can see that the “2007 edition” of the new maritime strategy is relatively moderate compared to the previous version in its use of words and style. It holds high the great banner of “cooperation,” elevates preventing war to the same strategic status as winning war, and takes it as an important mission for U.S. maritime power. For the first time, it acknowledges that the present world is “multipolar,” and believes that no country alone is capable of safeguarding the world’s maritime areas from terrorism and other threats. This thinking is suited to dealing concretely with world conditions. But the hegemonic U.S. thinking of dominating the world’s oceans has not changed at all. While the new strategy has produced some rhetorical changes, what it enumerates are essentially responses to the current global security situation and [consequent] requirements for America’s own interests. Its emphasis on “international cooperation” and demand for “allied participation” serve the U.S. global strategy. The people of the entire world are glad to see this transformation in strategic thinking, [but] will wait and see, hoping for genuine actions and practical results.

#### NEWS BACKGROUND

On 17 November, at the “International Seapower” Symposium held in the U.S. state of Rhode Island, a report entitled *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* was rapidly transmitted all over the world, arousing a high degree of attention among the world’s navies. Many articles have been written by military-theoretical circles to interpret and comment on the report. Why did this alarm the world? First, this document was jointly signed and issued by the three leading figures of U.S. maritime power—Chief of Naval Operations Roughead, Marine Corps Commandant Conway, and Coast Guard Commandant Allen—a rare occurrence. Second, at the Naval War College’s international naval symposium in Newport, Rhode Island, the new U.S. maritime strategy was announced in front of the heads of navies from over one hundred nations and regions. This is the first time in U.S. history that America’s maritime forces—the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard—jointly formulated and publicly announced a unified maritime strategy at an “international conference.”

### **AUTHOR'S COMMENTARY: THE NAVY, DARING VANGUARD OF U.S. GLOBAL STRATEGY**

The conclusion of *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* points out: “this strategy focuses on opportunities—not threats; on optimism—not fear; and on confidence—not doubt. . . . In the future, the navy will continue to unite in executing this strategy. U.S. maritime forces will always safeguard the nation and its major interests.” Obviously, the new U.S. maritime strategy’s issuance demonstrates that the strategic status of U.S. maritime forces has been further elevated. This is also the motivating reason and the result of the ability of the three U.S. maritime forces to work together to issue the new maritime strategy.

The Navy is the core force in strategic regions. The U.S. Navy continues to serve as the daring vanguard and main force of U.S. global strategy. The new strategy is absolutely unequivocal: “From now on, U.S. sea power will be concentrated in areas that have heightened tension or require the United States to fulfill commitments to allies. The United States will continue to deploy powerful operational forces in the Western Pacific, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean to protect U.S. and allied interests, and contain potential competitors.” The U.S. Navy is hoisting the banner of “humanitarian assistance operations and strengthening international cooperation,” and continuing “forward deployment” in maritime hotspots. Wherever a crisis emerges, U.S. carrier battle group[s] will appear there; this kind of strategic deployment cannot change.

Although *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* projects the pleasant wording of “peace,” “cooperation,” and “war prevention,” hegemonic thinking remains its main thread. For example, “we cannot permit a circumstance to arise in which our maritime power is deprived of mobility and freedom to operate in the sea lanes. Similarly, we cannot permit any enemy to attempt to block or disrupt major channels of maritime commerce or communication, thereby cutting off global supply lines. In circumstances of necessity, we have the capacity to control maritime space in any region, ideally with partners or allies participating, but alone when necessary.” Clearly, what is behind “cooperation” is America’s interests, having “partners or the participation of allies” likewise serves America’s global interests.

Strengthening “dynamic deployment.” As a result of the current uncertainty concerning maritime crises, the “static deployment mode” of large, fixed military bases is already unsuited to the requirements of the “war against terror.” The U.S. Navy’s overseas bases are decreasing in number, and it is shifting toward a “dynamic projection mode” of small-scale and temporary bases and globally deployed fleets. In line with the new maritime strategy, through “regular, temporary operations” such as joint military exercises and provision of humanitarian assistance, the U.S. military can leave behind a small number of important



military officials and turn places of strategic importance into “semi-permanent” bases; thus maintaining de facto military presence, still firmly withholding the U.S. global military strategic network, and implementing strategic encirclement of different kinds of maritime flashpoints and “potential enemy” through military deployment in “chokepoints” of navigation and strategic nodes. In this way, [the United States] can not only continue to preserve its military presence in strategic areas, but also avoid the “tremendous political risk” from maintaining overseas military bases. [The United States] can thus “kill two birds with one stone.”

Playing the leading role in the “war against terror.” Because of the navy’s special characteristics—such as its mobility, which gives it the ability to advance and withdraw, to deter and fight—naval fleets necessarily receive favorable attention. The exceptional document, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, formulated jointly by America’s three maritime forces, demonstrates that [the Navy] has been placed in an extremely prominent position. In peacetime, through “forward deployment,” the fleet “places the city under siege” in its deterrent effect. At the outset of war, warships shoot the “first shot” by launching guided missiles. In the course of war, naval vessels are both weapon launching platforms and mobile arsenals. At the conclusion of war, they can rapidly leave the battleground. In the Iraq “War to Overthrow Saddam,” the naval fleet was thoroughly brought into play with essential functions. In the domains of war time and space, the Navy has an indispensable role and achieves results that capture the attention of the world and receive “acclaim” from the U.S. authorities and the military, and it is regarded as an indispensable “trump card” for future “anti-terrorism” operations.

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#### TRANSLATOR’S NOTE

The article was originally published in *People’s Navy*, 27 November 2007, p. 3. The chief editor of that edition was Wu Chao, the intern editor Yuan Zhenjun.