

2003

President's Forum

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Recommended Citation

Rempt, Rodney P. (2003) "President's Forum," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 56 : No. 2 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol56/iss2/3>

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PRESIDENT'S FORUM



“A man without a vision is like a ship’s commander without a destination.”

THIS APPROPRIATELY NAUTICAL QUOTE comes from business pioneer J. C. Penney, who reflected on the importance of vision nearly a century ago. As Mr. Penney astutely noted, a *man* without a vision is largely adrift, but this can be said with equal certainty about an *organization*. A bold step has been taken by the Navy’s leadership to provide direction by crafting a comprehensive vision for the future of the service—“Seapower 21.” In June 2002, for the first time in a public forum, the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Vern Clark, presented his vision for the U.S. Navy in a speech delivered at the Naval War College: “My thoughts on this [“Seapower 21”] have been evolving over the last couple of years through my visits to the War College, discussions with the Strategic Studies Group here, talking to the people at the Navy Warfare Development Command, talking to special groups set up by the President of the Naval War College here, working with groups in Washington, and talking about what our future is all about.”

The details of this Navy vision have been widely published, and I will not attempt to reiterate them here (readers can find an executive presentation and an explanatory article at www.nwc.navy.mil). I would, however, like to reflect rather broadly on the degree to which this new vision is both revolutionary and transformational.

“Seapower 21” describes a future Navy that will provide the nation with a triad of capabilities that are unique to the naval service. These capabilities are designed to meet the challenges brought about by the political, strategic, and technological changes that have occurred since the fall of communism and the onset of the Terror War.

Three fundamental concepts constitute the CNO's vision of the nation's maritime capabilities for the future:

- Sea Strike: the ability to project precise and persistent offensive power from the sea
- Sea Shield: the ability to extend defensive assurance throughout the world
- Sea Basing: The ability to enhance operational independence and support for joint forces.

Aspects of each of these concepts will be recognized by naval strategists and operators as traditional missions for the Navy. On closer examination, however, "Seapower 21" provides a vision of the future in which the service has significantly transformed how it views itself and how it can contribute to solving national challenges.

Navy Roles and Missions—with a Difference!

Sea Strike. For over two centuries American sailors have reached inland from the sea to influence events ashore. Sometimes it has been direct influence, through cannon fire against a coastal fort or by putting sailors and Marines ashore. In other cases, the influence was more indirect in nature, through maritime blockade and other means of interrupting seaborne commerce. The concept of Sea Strike recognizes that technology now allows naval forces to *influence decisively* events ashore, with a reach farther inland than was ever imagined by Mahan, Corbett, or even more recent naval strategists. Operational commanders will employ strike aircraft, cruise missiles, long-range gunfire, special operations forces, information operations, Marine (and other-service) ground forces, and other offensive capabilities from a secure and tactically agile afloat support base.

This capability has already been clearly demonstrated during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, where Navy and Marine Corps forces repeatedly and effectively engaged enemy forces in Afghanistan from ships operating hundreds of miles from their targets. In the first seventy-six days of operations, the United States flew 6,500 strike missions over Afghanistan, of which 75 percent were flown by Navy carrier-based aircraft. New systems and capabilities will provide the ability to strike or capture vital areas even farther inland in support of national objectives.

In the future, the Marines, supported from ships at sea, may be called upon to seize an inland airfield, hold it for a period of time, and ultimately turn it over to follow-on army and air forces. This was exactly the case in the closing months of 2001 when, during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, the first conventional forces to be engaged in Afghanistan were U.S. Marines from Task Force 58. They established a forward operating base on a desert airstrip south of Kandahar and

held this position until relieved more than sixty days later by elements of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division. Such operations hark back to the operational concept of Marines "seizing and holding bases"—a concept that was planned (and gamed at the Naval War College) before World War II and then executed brilliantly in the Pacific campaigns of that war. The concepts embodied in Sea Strike take the traditional Navy/Marine Corps capabilities and significantly extend them in range, flexibility, lethality, and endurance.

Sea Shield. Since the days of John Paul Jones, the essence of naval defense has been the defense of ships and, later, aircraft from attack. The mission was largely "force protection," safeguarding the fleet so that it could carry out its offensive missions. This traditional "defense of the fleet" mission will continue to be important, especially in facing a terrorist threat, but the concept of Sea Shield extends naval defensive firepower far beyond the task force, "projecting" defensive power deep inland. It will provide a defensive umbrella for forces ashore in a contested theater and even on American shores themselves. Senior Navy leaders have stated, "Sea Shield will provide a layered defense to protect the homeland, sustain access to contested littorals, and project a defense umbrella over coalition partners and joint forces ashore in distant theaters" (Vice Admiral Mike Bucchi, USN, and Vice Admiral Mike Mullen, USN, "Sea Shield: Projecting Global Defensive Assurance," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, November 2002, pp. 56–59).

Sea Shield will have many features and interrelated capabilities, such as airborne surveillance and tracking, long-range ship-launched counter-air weapons, and the ability to engage cruise missiles well inland. Most significant will be the Navy's contribution to missile defense. It will be the early-arriving cruisers and destroyers that protect vital ports and airfields to enable our forces to enter safely theaters of operations overseas. Indeed, our entire national strategy relies on rapid airlift and heavy sealift to get our Marines, soldiers, and airmen to the fight. Our sailors will provide the initial defense to enable their comrades in arms to reach the battlefield. Sea Shield will also provide a protective umbrella over the continental United States. No task is more important, nor is any more difficult, than shielding the lives and property of American forces and the American people.

Sea Basing. A fundamental strength of naval forces has always been their ability to conduct military operations from the sea for extended periods of time. U.S. Navy ships have always been virtual "islands of sovereign territory" that operate free from the restrictions of base rights, overflight permission, or political entanglements. The universally recognized "right of free passage" through international waters provides the United States with the most independent and secure

maneuver space for joint military forces. A recent article in the U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* made this point:

Sea Basing will be increasingly central to joint military planning because the traditional *advantages* enjoyed by afloat forces—such as independence, mobility, and security—are becoming ever more important to military affairs, while traditional limitations of sea-based forces—including operational reach and connectivity—have been largely overcome by new technologies and concepts of operations (Vice Admiral Charles W. Moore, Jr., USN, and Lieutenant General Edward Hanlon, Jr., USMC, “Sea Basing: Operational Independence for a New Century,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, January 2003, pp. 80–85).

The Sea Basing concept brings together the capabilities of the Navy’s combatant, command and control, and support ships with the impressive array of oilers, stores ships, ammunition ships, oceangoing tugs, hospital ships, and maritime prepositioning ships operated by the Military Sealift Command. Joining this force will be Coast Guard assets and the transports and logistics support ships operated by the U.S. Army. Netted together with improved C4I (command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence) systems, combatant commanders can operate from this powerful multiship “floating base,” indeed an entire overseas fleet, which can remain on station in support of combat operations for extended periods. Many components of the Sea Basing concept exist today, but future capabilities will result from investment in modern focused prepositioning ships; faster and more capable vertical-lift aircraft; high-speed surface craft, such as the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS), for agile in-shore transshipment; and new offload and in-stream cargo handling techniques. Developing the right ships to support a joint force operation in harm’s way ashore is key to realizing fully the benefits to our nation of basing at sea.

A National Vision for the Future

Many nations see the oceans of the world as barriers, hostile territories they fear to tread. However, long-term investment in maritime power has made the United States a master of this challenging environment. Fully two-thirds of the earth’s surface is covered by water, and “Sea Power 21” is a vision for the future that exploits our asymmetrical advantage in this realm. For centuries, the oceans served America as “moats” of great width that no enemy could easily traverse. Today, the notion of a defensive barrier has less meaning, but the oceans still provide a nearly unlimited maneuver space, from which our nation can be protected.

It is our nation’s naval forces that provide national freedom of action for the application of military power in an increasingly uncertain and complex world. They provide a commander the greatest operational flexibility and tactical

agility and offer more options than forces that require overflight permission or authorization to use ports or airfields in foreign lands. By using a combination of the *right* of freedom of the seas, and the *might* of U.S. forces to keep these sea-lanes open, naval forces enable the nation to take the fight to the enemy overseas.

Naval transformation is beginning to emerge as the catalyst for the transformation of how the nation applies military power. The ongoing transformation in the sea services is not solely technical, and it is not dependent on new ships, aircraft, weapon systems, or networks. Nor does this transformation radically alter the mission or essential characteristics of naval forces. Instead, the sea services are recognizing that the nation will increasingly project power from “afloat bases” constituted by battle groups, expeditionary forces, mission-specific action groups, and prepositioned ships.

Sea Power 21 is not just a vision for the Navy, it is a vision for the nation, and in many ways it represents our best hope in defending the American people and our cherished way of life.

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