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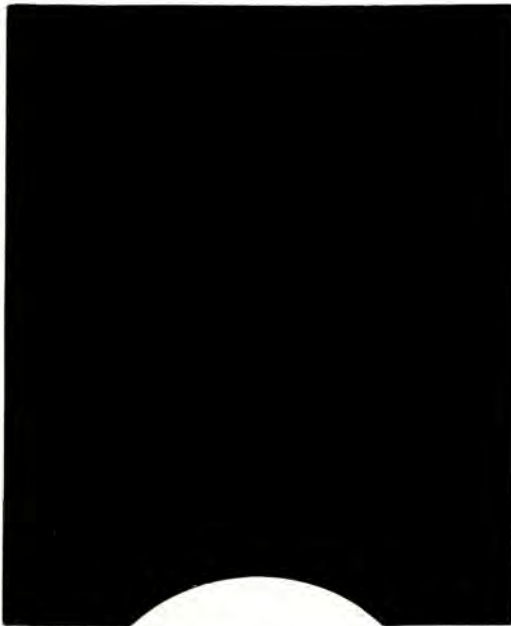
WORKING PAPER NO.297

MARITIME STRATEGY INTO
THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:
ISSUES FOR REGIONAL NAVIES

Jack McCaffrie



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ABSTRACT

The maritime strategies of navies in the Asia-Pacific region will change in the next century in response to emerging developments in the regional strategic environment. This paper examines factors which lead to such change and identifies emerging challenges and opportunities for regional navies. It predicts that, despite the post-Cold War strategic uncertainties, peacetime tasks and operations will become a more important part of maritime strategy as a broader definition of security gains acceptance. The versatility of navies, and of surface ships in particular, will continue to allow the application of limited or graduated force at sea and the projection of power ashore, and these attributes are likely to be used increasingly in support of constabulary, resource protection or diplomatic tasks. The trend towards an increase in multilateral operations is also likely to continue. This new emphasis will be reflected in naval force development, but must be balanced by the need to maintain an ability to counter realistic threats.

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MARITIME STRATEGY INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: ISSUES FOR REGIONAL NAVIES

Jack McCaffrie*

Anyone trying to predict developments in maritime strategy will do well to recall Mahan who, in the 1890s, was writing his most influential work, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783*.¹ Within 25 years of its publication, aircraft and submarines were changing significantly and unpredictably the way in which war at sea would be fought. So any effort to forecast the future for maritime strategy should avoid being too prescriptive: the identification of trends ought to be pursued rather than the prediction of events.

This caution is particularly apt in an era marked by continuous rapid change, instability and strategic uncertainty in many regions, including the Asia-Pacific. It is also apt in light of Mahan's view that maritime strategy is impervious to one of the major agents of change in the contemporary world - technology.² But with this caution in mind, there is a need to examine what the future holds for maritime strategy. The extent to which rapid change is influencing world affairs suggests that a traditionally based maritime strategy should be reviewed for contemporary and future relevance, so that a navy relying on it will be well positioned to deal with future demands.

This paper aims to identify likely trends in maritime strategic development and their potential impact on navies, all of which must be prepared to adapt to changing circumstances if they are to remain relevant to national security needs.

Strategic Challenges

Before considering the possibilities for maritime strategy in the new century, factors which could encourage or enforce change must be identified. These factors, or strategic challenges, will be the components of foreign and defence policies; their identification will allow strategy to take its rightful place as an outcome of policy.

One of the most important global factors could be the future of the nation state. According to at least one writer, its power is apparently leaking away to supranational, transnational and sectional organisations and interests.³ Important, too, is the evident transition to a multipolar world with attendant instability and uncertainty. One of the immediate strategic challenges is how to structure forces in the face of uncertainty, with generally diminishing defence

* Captain Jack McCaffrie is Director-General of the Maritime Studies Program, Australian Department of Defence.

budgets and without clear threats.⁴ The instability and uncertainty now so prevalent are unlikely to disappear by the early part of the twenty-first century, because in many cases they are contemporary manifestations of long-running problems, as in the former Yugoslavia:⁵ where these problems result in armed conflict, international pressure for resolution may be absent or insufficient, as proved to be the case for so long there.⁶

Contrasting with the perceived effects of multipolarity and uncertainty is the world-wide expectation that defence spending should reduce in the wake of the Cold War.⁷ Even though the 'peace dividend' has been notably absent in the Asia-Pacific thus far, not all the region's navies have enjoyed increasing budgets.⁸ Some, like Australia's, will continue to plan in the face of both continuing strategic uncertainty and diminishing or constant finances.⁹ There will also be pressures for a diversion of funds to environmental and social concerns as well as desires by governments to reduce public expenditure generally.

These factors, together with new definitions of security, could also combine to encourage questions about the function of military forces into the next century. If, as Till argues, this function is to be management of turmoil rather than the fighting of wars, the military faces fundamental change.¹⁰ Evidence of such a trend is manifest in the growing recourse to peacekeeping operations under UN or other multinational groupings.¹¹ The specific training needed to cope with such missions, and the increasing number of them, could have an impact on the capacity of military forces to fight major wars.¹²

Environmental issues will also impact on maritime forces - both as restrictions applying to activities and as regulations requiring enforcement. The fact that environmental concerns will have global, regional and national dimensions will add to their contentiousness. For example, the declaration of 200 nm exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and the realisation that some of the oceans' living resources are being over-exploited will inevitably involve maritime forces in future. There have already been warnings of a 'creeping breakdown of our society' if environmental degradation continues unchecked.¹³ Maritime forces can expect a growing commitment to offshore resource protection, as local fish stocks will come under increasing pressure from overfishing in other parts of the world.¹⁴ This commitment will be reinforced by the growing demand for offshore oil and gas.

Other issues which could contribute to ongoing instability include the likelihood of a worldwide continuation of arms transfers.¹⁵ This will be manifest, for example, in the introduction of increasingly sophisticated weaponry into the Asia-Pacific region¹⁶ and will require monitoring of these developments and their impact by regional maritime forces. The recently begun move towards more sophisticated maritime weapons seems set to continue, fuelled either by economic capacity and the desire for maritime security or by

uncertainty and legacies of mistrust.¹⁷ The challenge for some countries will include the need to reconcile the desire (or need) to retain a technological edge *vis-à-vis* neighbours¹⁸ with the equally compelling desire for security without military competition.

Strategic challenges are also built into issues such as interpretation of the law of the sea. While the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) III guarantees certain freedoms it also creates additional opportunities for tension or conflict. This has come about through:

- the creation of adjoining maritime zones, including EEZs, and the consequent limits on freedom of navigation;
- the regime of archipelagic transit passage and the straits nominated for it, also with limits to freedom of navigation;¹⁹
- the intensifying search for offshore minerals and the attendant need to reach agreement on yet unresolved maritime boundaries, which could affect resource ownership and exploitation; and
- the reduced areas in which high sea freedoms can be enjoyed.

The Indian Ocean will also present a strategic challenge into the next century and regional countries will need to be consistently more attentive to economic and strategic developments there. This will be particularly the case as India and other South Asian nations begin to benefit from more open economies, seek greater involvement with other regional nations, and perhaps become militarily more powerful. The importance of the Indian Ocean is also likely to grow as India tries to improve her own relations with Southeast Asia.²⁰

Japan, China, the Koreans and perhaps a resurgent Russia may also seek to develop greater military power than they already have. Any moves by Japan are most likely to be in the maritime sphere, given her national interests.²¹ The potential for conflict over maritime boundary and resource issues in the South China Sea is already well known,²² and while the need to exploit resources could see some reasonably early resolution of a sharing regime, the sovereignty issue does not appear similarly amenable. For consideration, too, is the fact that these developments will take place in a region hosting a reduced US military presence.

These strategic challenges will necessitate some fundamental questioning by regional military forces in general and by maritime forces in particular. Each country must show a continuing willingness to ask why it needs a navy, before considering what kind of navy might be needed or wanted. This approach should ensure that strategic challenges - new or enduring - always inform important judgements. Maritime countries also need to confront the growing importance of oceans policy, encompassing most or all maritime issues, because it has the potential to broaden the range of issues included in maritime strategy. These developments could also lead to increasing pressures for 'green-water' or offshore tasks to be done by navies, civilian agencies or

contracted commercial operators. There is evidence of moves in this direction already,²³ and in Till's view the decreasing likelihood of a 'serious' war at sea can only accelerate them.²⁴ So the size and shape of the region's navies (or maritime forces) could change substantially.

Technology will certainly remain a challenge for navies in the future. On the one hand, Mahan had the view that technology would affect tactics but not strategy. On the other hand, James Cable argues that traditional strategies can no longer be employed without considerable modification.²⁵ As an example, he notes how the development of steam propulsion, mines, torpedoes and long-range coastal artillery eroded the faith of the British in close blockade. Mahan could still be correct, but (as Cable points out) the way in which strategies are implemented will continue to be affected by technological developments. In future the challenge for this region is likely to remain the rate at which regional navies are able to introduce and operate high-technology maritime warfare weapons systems and how their neighbours choose, or are forced, to react to these developments.

Strategic Opportunities

Reflection on the challenges outlined above will show that there will also be strategic opportunities for maritime forces in the coming century. Many of them will emerge from 'peaceful' demands on resources. Those which involve conflict may not make the kinds of demands for which nations have prepared in the past. Sovereignty protection, environmental protection and peacekeeping operations are examples of the issues which will be more important in future.

But this should still be seen as an opportunity rather than as a challenge or difficulty. Navies have always been noted for their versatility and, in particular, their utility in situations short of conflict.²⁶ This versatility comes from the characteristics of reach (including sustainability), adaptability (including the capacity to threaten and apply force in a finely graduated way), and acceptability (in that warships are diplomatic instruments unlike any other kind of armed force).²⁷

Inherent in the versatility of maritime forces is the peacetime role of forward presence²⁸ and while this role is most effectively played by navies with the full range of maritime capabilities, the regional influence which smaller navies can have should not be underestimated. The opportunities for such influence in future are likely to be numerous if, as is expected, fewer significant wars occur at sea. An example of how influence through presence can be a factor for smaller navies is Australia's use of maritime force deployments in Southeast Asian waters in support of the policy of regional engagement.²⁹

Strategic opportunities could also come from the use of navies for coalition or alliance building, as occurred so effectively in the Desert Shield operation.³⁰ There are sufficient latent maritime tension or conflict points in the Asia-

Pacific³¹ to suggest that naval coalition building could be useful in preventing conflict or in peacekeeping. Admittedly, this kind of activity would require a degree of regional multilateral cooperation not possible or even contemplated at present. Nevertheless, an aim of the present regional security dialogue is to encourage multilateralism.

The maintenance of good order at sea will also provide peacetime strategic opportunity for regional navies. The growing reliance on offshore resources, living and inanimate, will necessitate cooperation if conflict is to be avoided and if resources are to be extracted sustainably.³² The declaration of 200 nm EEZs by all regional countries, plus the fact that fish stocks do not remain within national boundaries, creates much scope for regional navies to cooperate in ensuring orderly and sustainable exploitation. Already, indiscriminate and unregulated fishing activities have led to negotiating sessions of the UN Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, with further sessions scheduled.³³

'Good order' activities will also extend to environmental monitoring and protection. Issues to be dealt with are almost certain to include pollution monitoring, policing and control; and oceanographic and hydrographic monitoring and reporting by warships, as well as by dedicated research vessels.³⁴ This emphasis on non-military activities may seem out of place, but history shows that these activities have long been a legitimate part of naval life³⁵ and have been accepted as such by strategists like Mahan, for whom the economic foundations of seapower were always important.³⁶ The importance of these activities in the future will stem from the broader definition of security which navies will have to accept, as well as from the necessity for navies to become involved in the associated issues if they are to retain relevance during a possibly prolonged period without major conflict at sea.

Nevertheless, the need to keep operational skills at a high level of preparedness will remain, because of the already mentioned existence of maritime trouble spots within the region. Some of the disputes are sufficiently complex, long-standing and contentious that conflict over them cannot be ruled out.³⁷ Additionally, the seemingly ever-increasing importance of seaborne trade and offshore resources in the Asia-Pacific region suggests that new disputes could arise in future and might require intervention by maritime forces capable of responding flexibly, yet decisively.

The strategic opportunity which would accompany any involvement in disputes, or conflict, would be associated in the first place with the well-established use of navies for the political application of limited force,³⁸ which will favour the capacity of warships to apply force as it is warranted, and incrementally if necessary.³⁹ Conflict at sea could also occur in a more widely based war in which maritime operations played a lesser role. There are recent examples of this,⁴⁰ and although the value of the naval contribution in conflicts

like the 1991 Gulf War was substantial, navies must continue to review the combat circumstances in which their ships could find themselves in future.

This review process could include the US Navy's current fascination with projection of power ashore, its presumption of command of the sea, and whether the ideas are relevant to Asia-Pacific regional circumstances. The capability (however limited in particular circumstances) to project power ashore reflects the versatility of naval forces. It could be particularly valuable where land facilities for the support of operations are not available or, increasingly, it could be used to reduce the risk to other platforms. The strikes carried out by US Navy ship-launched cruise missiles (SLCM) against Iraq during and since the 1991 Gulf War exemplify this last option. Nevertheless, Till's contention that '...Western sailors will need to recast their theories and concepts to focus more on power *from* the sea and less on power *at* sea'⁴¹ needs to be treated carefully. Within the Asia-Pacific, no regional navy can look to the future confident of embarking on operations with sea control already assured. Perhaps the US Navy is also having second thoughts, with the latest version of its strategy, now titled 'Forward ... From the Sea'⁴² emphasising the need for naval forces in situations short of war to be engaged in forward areas, to prevent conflict and to control crises.

In the event of intense conflict, the region's navies will certainly need technological skills and advanced weapons. Their importance will remain underscored by the fact that the kinds of naval forces developed to cope with intense conflict have proved suitable also for lower level conflict.⁴³ This quality is likely to persist, but there must be continuing efforts to improve the ability of surface warships to operate in intense maritime conflict in future, given the nature of the threats to which they will be exposed. The most dangerous of these threats include sea-skimming missiles, launched from a variety of platforms, torpedoes and mines. And unless navies succeed in applying 'stealth' technology to ships, the threat will be compounded by the growing ability of some nations to monitor vast tracts of the world's surface.

Changes in Maritime Strategy into the Twenty-First Century

A maritime strategy for the early part of next century must be based on consideration of prospective national defence and foreign policies in the region. At present in the Asia-Pacific region, the stress is on engagement at various levels through institutions (some still evolving) such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). A major thrust of such policies in the region is economic; a desire to use the dramatic rates of economic growth to raise living standards. The defence element of these policies will focus more and more on external security as internal problems are resolved and as more conventional security matters become more salient. More

attention will also be paid to transparency and confidence building among the nations of the region.⁴⁴

The extent to which maritime issues will feature in regional strategies will depend on whether seaborne trade and its free passage continues to be a major factor in economic activity; on the capacity of the region to manage the various maritime boundaries still being contested; and on the development of a cooperative approach to offshore resources extraction.⁴⁵ Present indications are that seaborne trade will continue to grow with the regional economies⁴⁶ and so navigational freedoms will retain their importance. Similarly, while those nations for whom maritime boundaries and offshore resources are an issue continue to express the desire for peaceful resolution, there can be no guarantee that some or all of these contentious issues will be resolved in any way, let alone peacefully, within the foreseeable future. Consequently, maritime issues will continue to play a significant part in the military strategies of nations in the Asia-Pacific region.

One of the advantages often claimed for maritime strategy is that it has a peacetime dimension.⁴⁷ The point is also well made by Ken Booth in his triangle of naval functions - diplomatic, constabulary and military⁴⁸ - which seemingly gives more emphasis to the peacetime aspects. One of the changes which is likely to overtake maritime strategy in the twenty-first century is a growth in the peacetime use of maritime forces for diplomatic and constabulary missions, and perhaps an acceptance that the peacetime use could well become the primary one.

This will happen, firstly, because of the growing importance of international economics,⁴⁹ which will highlight the continuing importance of secure sea lanes, with trade remaining a central element of global economic activity. It will also strengthen the need to ensure that those sea lanes will remain secure and capable of safely carrying their trade. Navies will have to be active in this, alone or within UN or other multilaterally sponsored arrangements, practising preventative diplomacy.⁵⁰

There is a broad range of tasks inherent in peacetime strategy, including counter-terrorism, counter-smuggling, anti-narcotics operations, and anti-piracy operations. Tasks can also include humanitarian operations, like evacuation, disaster relief, search and rescue and environmental protection. Another task, which has already engaged some navies in the region and shows signs of growing in significance, is naval peacekeeping and peace enforcement.⁵¹

Any of these peacetime activities can be challenging for various reasons, requiring professionalism and possibly some additional skills. The most challenging demand, however, is likely to be gaining acceptance for these tasks within regional navies. A major difficulty will be reconciling the skill and time demands of peacetime operations with the continuing need to retain warfighting skills, in the face of ever-changing and increasingly demanding technologies.

The price for navies failing to accept this new priority for peacetime operations will be increasing irrelevance. Constrained defence budgets will be the norm for the developed countries, and while the need to be prepared for conventional conflict will not have disappeared it may become more difficult to justify to citizens for whom major conflict will seem an incredible prospect.

To determine how the conflict dimension of maritime strategy could change for regional navies, we need only to recall that the primary purpose of any maritime strategy has been to gain *control of the sea* for some purpose and to consider whether that is set to remain so. The need for sea control arose from the capacity of the sea to provide a medium for communications, military and commercial.⁵² This need has not changed over the centuries and is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. For evidence of this we need look no further than the way in which many countries in East and Southeast Asia depend on the sea for their explosive economic growth.⁵³

The future need for sea control in the Asia-Pacific will be boosted by growing dependence on offshore resources, the attractiveness of those resources to others and the potential for resource-related disputes over maritime boundaries.⁵⁴ This could have implications for the region's navies, with Southeast Asia and East Asia especially vulnerable in view of the many still unresolved maritime boundaries in the region.⁵⁵ And of course regional navies would also need to be able to exercise sea control in support of offshore territories, or their mainland territory, against military threat. In examining how sea control might be achieved in the future, Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond's words should be recalled:

Command of the sea is the indispensable basis of security and whether the instrument which exercises that command swims, floats or flies is a mere matter of detail.⁵⁶

Thinking in this way should allow us to concentrate on the objective (sea control for a specific purpose) without becoming too attached to any particular means of achieving it; an issue which could assume growing significance with technological advances. One of the traditionally accepted means of achieving sea control has been through decisive battles at sea which, in the event, have been relatively rare.⁵⁷ In recent times, however, the naval engagements of the Falklands War could merit the description. While decisive major fleet actions are unlikely to be any more frequent in future maritime conflict, there is no reason why smaller scale engagements, particularly within the Asia-Pacific region, could not be decisive in future. The destruction or turning back of any naval force with designs on national interests or territory could be decisive. Any engagements which had the result of denying access to straits or other internationally important sea routes could also be decisive.

Furthermore, many regional countries are bounded at least partly by seas or oceans and so have developed strategies requiring the capability to engage

forces in their maritime approaches, thus giving priority to attaining sea control in the generally accepted sense. This requirement also will remain for the foreseeable future. More debatable is how sea control will be achieved; however briefly and over however limited an area. Indications are that continuing technological advances in maritime weapons will become available to many navies in the region,⁵⁸ thereby encouraging a situation in which each may be forced to remain at the forefront of technological developments, lest another nation gain or retain a technological edge with capabilities which could be brought to bear against them.⁵⁹

Blockade is the second of the traditional means by which sea control has been sought. As a purely military operation seeking to obtain sea control it should not be confused with economic blockade, which has long been part of the peacetime dimension of maritime strategy.⁶⁰ Although surface ships will not enjoy the immunity in future blockade operations which they had in the past, there is no reason why, in the future, blockade cannot be conducted by submarines or mines. Royal Navy submarine operations in the Falklands War give some idea of what could be achieved.⁶¹

Maintenance of a fleet-in-being is the third of the traditionally accepted ways of seeking sea control. In Corbett's view, this involves the maintenance of fleets inferior to those of the major naval powers, but capable of seriously affecting their operations. A good example of the concept is the Japanese Navy's plan to conduct a number of lesser actions against the superior US Navy early in the Second World War, with the aim of reducing the imbalance between the two fleets so that Japan could contemplate a decisive battle with some hope of success.⁶² Most regional navies are not likely, in future, to be able to deploy preponderant maritime power. Consequently, the quest for sea control will be undertaken in situations where rough parity among relatively small deployed forces is more likely to be the case and in which the application of technology and quality of training will probably be decisive.

A method of using the sea as a means of communication when sea control is contested, or in the hands of an opponent, is that of avoiding battle. The concept is most familiar in its guise of evasive routing of convoys. It will retain relevance for the future and may even be assisted by technological developments, especially those associated with ships' signature control.⁶³ Ongoing efforts to reduce or disguise the physical and electronic signatures of surface ships and submarines will be important in the defence against technologically advanced threats. On the other hand, technology will also be conspiring against naval forces, and the geography of the Asia-Pacific will always be a factor in limiting maritime forces' ability to avoid combat. In particular, partly enclosed seas and straits, to which shipping is naturally drawn, will complicate ships' problems.

Strategic strike, or the projection of power ashore, are capabilities which in

the Asia-Pacific region now rest primarily in strike aircraft. But, as Australia's recent Defence White Paper notes, advances in air defence technology are increasing the risks to aircraft in this role.⁶⁴ Consequently, an argument is being advanced now that the role of manned attack aircraft in strategic strike could in future be taken over by land attack cruise missiles, at least some of which would be launched from ships at sea.⁶⁵ For the present, at least, there are definite limits to this proposition, especially for smaller navies, but it is sure to become more tenable in future as the new technologies become more widely available.⁶⁶

It really does seem to be a case of the more things change the more they stay the same. Our need to use the sea will not reduce, although some of the uses to which it will be put could be new. Our need to provide secure access to the sea and control of it, for a variety of purposes, will not diminish. The geography of the region in which navies will seek to exercise control will remain the same and will continue to be a determining factor in the formulation of strategy. Apart from the increasing dominance of the peacetime element in maritime strategy, the other substantial change will be in the way that maritime strategy is effected - something which will be determined very much by technological developments. This will impact directly on future force structure.

The Future and Naval Force Development

The inherent flexibility, mobility, reach and sustainability of surface warships⁶⁷ will still be needed in the immediate future, perhaps to an even greater degree.⁶⁸ This will emerge from the increasing emphasis on peacetime tasks, some of them with multinational forces. Also, the increasing use of maritime forces to foster confidence and security, and the attendant prospects for growing commonality of weapons systems in the Asia-Pacific region, could present navies with problems in the unfortunate event of regional conflict.⁶⁹ Where each side in a conflict relies on the same weapons, ever greater reliance will be placed on training, experience, and the ability to use and maintain technologically advanced systems.

Even though peacetime requirements will not come to be determinants for force structure development for most navies,⁷⁰ there will, nevertheless, be a need to have available ships with the capacity to contribute to international stability, for example by carrying stores, by incorporating medical facilities and by being capable of carrying large numbers of people.⁷¹ But countries will also need the continuing availability of surface warships capable of graduated application of force and of dealing with any maritime threats which could be brought to bear against regional nations in credible levels of conflict.

The characteristics needed by warships in peacetime will also apply in any level of conflict. Consequently, force structures will continue to be influenced by the extensive and varied nature of the maritime interests evident in the Asia-Pacific region. In turn, warships which can meet such demands will in many

cases have long endurance⁷² and range, the ability to operate in extreme weather conditions and the ability to contribute to maritime warfare in its most complex and demanding forms. As the paper has argued, however, regional navies should also give some priority to vessels suited primarily to offshore protection tasks. That many regional navies will indeed concentrate on offshore operations is implicit in Till's assessment that the majority of the 1,700 naval vessels to be built over the next decade will be the smaller coastal patrol vessels and corvettes, and that nearly 70 per cent of these will go to Asian or NATO navies.⁷³

Force structure development will also be influenced by the long life expected from warship hulls and the need for warships to be able to adapt to tasks (and cope with threats) not anticipated at the time of their introduction into service.⁷⁴ This point will tend to reinforce a demand for relatively simple, multi-role platforms, with weapons systems which can be easily modified or replaced, and which can offer flexible responses to the challenges of regional conflict.⁷⁵ For some nations in the region, warships will also come to reflect the growing demands of information warfare. Developments such as these suggest that cost may become the determinant of capability to an even greater degree than is now the case.

The call for more flexibility in future could be a response to strategic uncertainty as well as a result of the broader definition of security and the wider range of tasking that may follow.⁷⁶ The need for endurance⁷⁷ will be matched by a need for sufficient numbers of ships to maintain extended deployments, and the means of sustaining them on deployment. Navies for which sustained or long-range operations will be a force structure determinant should give some priority to at sea replenishment in future, as the present capacity to sustain operations is limited in regional navies by the small number of replenishment ships of any kind.

Undoubtedly, one of the most vexing and important force structure development issues will be the response of navies with 'blue-water' ambitions to the provision of air defence at sea. Air superiority at sea is likely to remain an inescapable part of sea control⁷⁸ and will remain so at least while the threat posed by low-flying aircraft and sea-skimming missiles remains so potent. As James Cable put it in a recent article:

Only in exceptional circumstances can lesser navies, when not acting in concert with the United States, risk war in confined waters within range of hostile land-based aircraft and missiles.⁷⁹

This is an overstatement in relation to present circumstances in the Asia-Pacific region, but it could prove to be more accurate in future, if the ability of surface ships to counter the air threat is not improved.

How the problem is tackled will determine the extent to which surface warship vulnerability remains an issue into the twenty-first century. The

essential airborne early warning function is unlikely to be available from land-based early warning and control (EW & C) aircraft to the extent felt necessary. Consequently, some form of ship-launched or land-based unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) could play an important role, together with substantial use of signature reduction techniques and decoys.

The question of surface warship vulnerability will continue to influence force structure development. A possible outcome would see the importance of submarines grow for some tasks in intense conflict. Submarines could, for example, contribute substantially to some sea denial operations, especially where the threat to surface warships was considered to be too great, or where the uncertainty associated with potential submarine presence would be an advantage. An understandable reluctance to compromise its ability to remain undetected, together with the submarine's inability to counter the full range of threats encountered at sea, will continue to limit its contribution to the quest for sea control. The vulnerability issue may also influence the argument in favour of greater numbers of larger and relatively simple ships.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the warships of the future will need to have information processing and distributing capabilities well beyond what is available now. For the future, the fog of war will more likely be caused by a surfeit of indigestible information than by a lack of information. Success in conflict at sea will depend on a navy's capacity to harness the information almost certain to be available.

The Future Employment of Regional Navies

We are well acquainted with the need 'to do more with less' and although future employment for many navies is sure to reflect this concept, there is one aspect in which limitations could well apply. The coming into force of the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention on 16 November 1994 formalised a new legal regime at sea, and although it is remarkably liberal it does herald the rise in influence of coastal states, many of them relatively newly independent and more concerned with having control of their waters than with ensuring free passage for others.

'Creeping jurisdiction' is here to stay, and there is a prospect that traditionally exercised freedoms of the sea will become circumscribed. For example, even though the requirement is not enforced, Indonesia requires that all foreign warships passing through its territorial waters should seek prior clearance.⁸⁰ There is already talk of restrictions on certain vessels using international straits for (seemingly quite legitimate) safety reasons. And it is conceivable that at some point, in some straits, warships could be subject to such restrictions, for similar or other reasons. There is also a proposal by Indonesia to limit archipelagic sea lane passage through its waters in a way which would exclude east-west passage from the regime.⁸¹ Warships might not

If predictions of more emphasis on peacetime operations come to pass then the kinds of deployments carried out by navies, as well as the areas of the world to which they proceed, could vary from existing practice. Constabulary tasks will become more important, especially for the protection of offshore resources and the maintenance of sovereignty in territorial and contiguous waters, involving operations in support of customs, immigration, sanitary and fiscal laws.⁸² The tasks will not be purely naval; other departments with maritime interests will contribute in the way that Coastwatch⁸³ does now in Australia, and pressure for separate coast guards may well eventuate. Were such pressure to succeed, it would have implications for naval deployments, if not for force structure and for the availability of personnel.

Informal and formal, bilateral and multilateral agreements among navies of the region, as they evolve in the next few years, will also impact on employment of the region's navies, and perhaps other elements of their armed forces. Their effects will reinforce Till's argument that navies will be independent actors to a much lesser degree than has been the case.⁸⁴ Common solutions will be sought to common problems and many navies could well find themselves contributing to multinational (regional) rapid reaction forces.⁸⁵ Undoubtedly, the region is some way from any such arrangement now, but it would be a logical if not inevitable outcome of present efforts to improve regional cooperation.

Just how the push towards engagement and cooperative maritime activity in peacetime will influence employment in wartime is very difficult to gauge. As yet there is no sign of any arrangements which would bind any one country to direct assistance for another regional country. On the other hand, while the peacetime efforts are aimed, *inter alia*, at preventing conflict, there is no guarantee that they will fully succeed. That being the case, a logical, but again not inevitable, outcome of peacetime cooperation would be cooperation in wartime. There would of course be implications for all kinds of issues; interoperability, information sharing, and combined planning, for example. The difficulties in achieving this degree of cooperation suggest that it will not be achieved within the region for many years.

Finally, in the context of wartime employment, there is the question of how surface warships will cope with more advanced weapons systems which will be available to many countries and how other platforms might assist with or take up their tasks in intense conflict. Among many uncertainties is one certainty: success for surface warships will depend on capable and readily available early warning systems as well as on equally capable defensive weapons.

Conclusions

This paper set out to examine challenges and opportunities facing maritime strategy into the twenty-first century and to identify the possible implications for maritime strategy, maritime force development and employment of these challenges and opportunities. The paper examined the issues from the viewpoint of Asia-Pacific navies in general, but the judgements made could be seen to apply more specifically to small or medium-sized navies.

The paper has shown that the future will hold some substantial challenges for maritime strategy, the most important of which will stem from international instability and uncertainty following the passing of the stable, bipolar Cold War world. In the Asia-Pacific region the uncertainty will be most evident in maritime affairs in Northeast Asia, the South China Sea and, to a lesser extent, in the Indian Ocean. Other challenges will include related changes to the functions of military forces in the face of reducing defence budgets for some and continuing conventional arms transfers for others.

By contrast, the paper also identified some opportunities which the changing situation could present for maritime strategy. Foremost among these will be that provided by the increasing importance which peacetime operations and tasks will assume, particularly as a broader definition of security gains greater acceptance. These opportunities, the need to be able to apply limited or graduated force at sea and the ability to project power ashore will ensure that the well-recognised versatility of navies, and of surface ships in particular, will continue to be invaluable attributes.

Naturally, challenges and opportunities, such as those identified, will impact on the way in which maritime strategy is enacted in future years. The existence of an extensive range of varied maritime interests in the region will ensure that national military strategies will become or remain significantly maritime in character. Consequently, the need for sea control will remain, although the reasons for which it is sought and the means by which it is sought may well change. Furthermore, despite the post-Cold War strategic uncertainties, peacetime tasks and operations will become a far more important part of maritime strategy.

Different aspects of maritime strategy will be emphasised in the next century and naval force development will have to take account of this. The acknowledged versatility of warships will continue to be a most important factor in force development, to cope with peacetime demands and various levels of conflict. Unceasing attention will also have to be given to the capacity of surface ships to defeat the kinds of threats to which they are most likely to be subject - this applies especially to the sea-skimming missile threat.

The final outcome of this consideration of strategic challenges and opportunities, and of the response of maritime strategy to them, is that maritime forces will be employed somewhat differently in the foreseeable future. Navies

could well find their operations circumscribed in some areas because of the increasing jurisdiction accruing to coastal states as a result of the enforcement of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982). There will be a greater emphasis on constabulary and other peacetime tasks and there will be some moves to multilateral operations, both in peace and in conflict. The way in which navies approach conflict will also be determined by the capacity of their forces to deal with the full range of maritime operations and their ability to counter threats. Perhaps the biggest challenge for the region's navies will be in identifying the important developments in maritime strategy, and in responding appropriately to them.

Notes

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