# "Reflections on the 2007 Maritime Strategy and the Future of Maritime Thinking in the U.S. Navy"

**CAPT Peter D. "Pete" Haynes, USN (Ph.D)**
**Deputy Director, Strategy, Plans, and Policy (J5), U.S. Special Operations Command**

The 2007 Maritime Strategy is a bifurcated document, one that reveals tensions between its halves—the first of which provides the "why" (i.e., the purpose of U.S. maritime forces) and the second addresses "how" the strategy will be operationalized. Each represents a different strategic approach, only one of which can be seen in the 2015 version.

The "why" represents the thinking of the CNO that commissioned it, Admiral Mike Mullen and his deputy CNO for Operations, Plans and Strategy, Vice Admiral John Morgan. In 2006, Mullen had come to the Naval War College and called for a new maritime strategy. "I am here to challenge you," he noted, "First, to rid yourselves of the old notion—held by so many for so long—that maritime strategy exists solely to fight and win wars at sea, and the rest will take care of itself. In a globalized…world the rest matters a lot."

One would be hard pressed to find a comment by a CNO that was more damning of the Navy's narrow worldview. To Mullen and Morgan, the Navy had for far too long understood its purpose in terms of warfighting. The Navy had embraced the battle-centric Mahan, and ignored the system-centric Mahan and, as a consequence, the Navy had neglected the full range of economic and political effects that American seapower can achieve, particularly in an era of globalization.

Another consequence was that the Navy squandered opportunities to form meaningful arguments in relation to competing forms of U.S. military power—the Air Force and Army, who, unlike the U.S. maritime services, did not have a preeminent role in sustaining the U.S. political and economic system and underwriting the political, commercial, and security conditions necessary for the prosperity of the United States and its key partners.

After all, a maritime strategy—in war or peace—has always been more directly concerned with the relationship between the state and global markets than those associated with land or air power, a statement as true of the Age of Sail as it is today.

The "why" half acknowledged that a maritime strategy was well-suited to the interests of a state whose prosperity and security interests have always been linked to and depended upon the vitality of the world economy, and to the free markets, open societies, and democratic politics that have (so far) accompanied sustained economic success.

If the first half promised a radical shift in the Navy's strategic outlook, the second, more pragmatic "how" half promised the opposite.

The "how" half represented the operationally inclined thinking of the new CNO, Admiral Gary Roughead, who fundamentally changed the section before signing the document. It reflected the limitations imposed by the need to find consensus between the Navy's "maritime-systemic" admirals and the "warfighting" admirals, and the realities of rationalizing the Navy and Marine Corps in ways that would derive fiscal support, the most proven of which was to do so in terms of warfighting, which what the second half essentially did.

In the end, Mullen and Morgan got their maritime strategy (or at least, in retrospect, a maritime strategic outlook), but how the 2007 Maritime Strategy would be implemented and resourced ultimately accorded more with the preferences of warfighters like Admiral John Nathman and Secretary of the Navy Donald Winter.

By itself, the 2007 version implied that while the *ends* of U.S. naval strategy had changed fundamentally, with the adoption of the goal to protect and enable the system, the *means* would not be altered—and those means were all about warfighting. Although the *ways* in which those means were to be used promised to change, there is little indication that they have.

In what was a brilliant fusing by Bryan McGrath of the deeply held beliefs of the Navy's two factions, the 2007 version was a hybrid strategy that essentially stated that the best way to protect and maintain the system was to focus on deterring great-power wars from starting in the first place, and then from escalating to the point where they threatened global stability or, in the case of the First World War, the system itself.

The 2015 version aimed to redress the most noted faults of the 2007 version—the lack of detail of "how" the three services will be designed, organized, and employed, in which case it did in a thorough and pragmatic fashion. The new version framed the maritime services' purpose on what Geoff Till calls "a more muscular emphasis" not on defending the *system*, but defending the *nation*. The "why" was in terms of operational-level requirements associated with the need for forward presence, access and cyber challenges, the pivot to East Asia, and the functions of deterrence, sea control, power projection, maritime security, and all-domain access.

So, if one were looking for an expansion of maritime thought in the 2015 version, and, specifically, how U.S. maritime forces would enable the system and bring about the full range of economic and political effects that American seapower can achieve in war or peace, one would be disappointed.

One might wonder if that absence and the 2015 version's embracing of the 2007 version's warfighting logic signals a return of maritime ideas to the margins of consideration, the victim of the latter's inability to secure the funds for a large, globally deployed fleet.

If the 2007 version argues that the purpose of the U.S. maritime services should not be seen in terms of the *threats* to the United States, but in light of the relationship between the United States and its *system*, then the maritime services, with the 2015 version, seem poised to argue the opposite, and with it, presumably, the assumption that "the rest will take care of itself."

If one has doubts as to the future of maritime—as opposed to naval—thinking in the Navy, Jim Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara remind us that one should have no such doubts on the part of the world's most avid students of Mahan—the Chinese, who are, at this minute, exploring how to derive the full range of economic and political effects that Chinese seapower can achieve in war, peace, and the widening and no-less consequential space between war and peace.