

Developing Maritime Strategy

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John Maynard Keynes is often quoted as saying something to the effect of “When the facts change, I change my opinion. What do you do, Sir?” It is unclear whether Keynes actually uttered these words, but they serve as a reasonable starting point for my role on this panel.

In December of 2009, it occurred to me that the facts had indeed changed, the facts associated with and accounted for in the 2007 Maritime Strategy, with which I was generally associated as team lead and lead author. Consequently, I took to the blogosphere to describe how my opinion had changed in a piece on Information Dissemination entitled [“Scrap the Maritime Strategy?”](#). In it and subsequent exchanges elsewhere, I made the case that the financial crisis that hit a year after the Maritime Strategy was released—along with China’s increasingly more aggressive stance in the South China Sea and Russia’s aggression in Georgia—had created a set of circumstances in which the fundamental assumptions underpinning the strategy were now overcome by events. Believing as I did from the beginning, that the strategy should be periodically reviewed and updated, I felt the time was ripe to do so.

I continued to maintain this position over the course of the next two years, and to it, I added a few additional considerations also born of events. First, I believed that we were entering a new era of great power contention, and that the country generally and the Navy specifically, needed to recognize this—strategically. Second, the notion of a more integrated version of American Seapower began to arise, in no small measure from the Marine Corps concept of “Single Naval Battle”, which seems to have been consigned to ash heap of history, but which I believed was a superb notion for the provision of economical and efficient conventional deterrence forces throughout much of the world that mattered to us.

In the fall of 2011, a newly announced CNO—Admiral Greenert—asked me to brief his transition team on two specific items. The first was process. He wanted me to go over how we organized and staffed for success in 2007, and what some of the challenges were. Secondly, he asked me to opine on how the 2007 document should change to reflect the new strategic environment. It was this second tasking that I relished, and here are the main points of what I told them:

- **The new document should explain why we need a strong, globally deployed Navy, and it should clearly identify the threats to our nation that such a Navy mitigates.**
- **After clearly identifying the threats, it should clearly articulate how it will respond.**

- **It should return to a three-hub construct (Mediterranean/Europe, Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean, Western Pacific)**
- **It should reference a classified companion document.**
- **It should embrace true integration between the Navy and the Marine Corps, not cooperation, nor coordination, nor interoperability, but true integration.**
- **It should make a coherent argument for supporting an industrial base sufficient not only for present needs but also for potential expansion.**

I concluded that presentation with the following words: “The framers of the updated Maritime Strategy have a unique opportunity, and that is the chance to influence Obama Administration thinking going into an election year. To that end, the document should be more specific, less aspirational and narrative-based, and more hard-edged than its predecessor. Such an approach would create a coherent strategic predicate for shifting resources within the Department of Defense to adequately fund required naval capability and capacity.”

Much to my chagrin and the disappointment of many others, the “refresh” of the 2007 strategy—which I called for in December 2009 and which was discussed in detail in the fall 2011 CNO Transition Team—did not appear until the beginning of last year (2015). Its development process bore little resemblance to the 2007 effort which, while I considered it to be cumbersome and bureaucratic at times, moved along with alacrity when compared to the 2015 version. Additionally, the time it took to get the document out resulted in team turnover, and the many iterations of the document showed consistent inconsistency of authorship. Along the way, I was asked at various times to provide my input—as were a number of others in this room.

When the document emerged, my friend and colleague Bryan Clark and I put out our thoughts in a post at [War on the Rocks](#). The main points we made were the following:

- **The strategy does not sufficiently explain the role and application of American Seapower in an era of increasing great power competition.**
- **The strategy establishes “all domain access” as a new function for the maritime services and suggests it is their most important contribution to joint warfare, but the position of all domain access in the strategy’s functional hierarchy is not clear.**
- **The new strategy does not address the need for a robust naval and maritime industrial base.**

What have I learned now from nearly eight years of working closely on Maritime Strategy, both as a maker of it and as a critic?

- **CNO Level interest and involvement is key. We had it in 2007, they did not in 2015.**
- **Make a plan, set milestones, meet them.**
- **Maritime Strategy must not only describe what is, it should describe what could be. It should not be afraid to put upward pressure on national policy.**
- **Maritime Strategy must not be deaf to Joint capabilities, but its job is not to shill for them. Maritime Strategy must describe the benefits conferred by Seapower.**
- **We have missed opportunities in two straight maritime strategies to make the case for a viable naval industrial base, and this is unfortunate. At the level of true strategy, there is little more important.**

I believe the 2015 strategy was a solid effort, but my support for it has diminished since its release. At the very least, the Department of the Navy should immediately begin to work on a classified strategy for American Seapower in an age of great power contention. We are well aware of what the table stakes are for great power dynamics, yet we seem unprepared to prepare for them. Some of this may be political, a sense of not wishing to get in front of civilian leadership. But it is within the civilian leadership that these ideas must take hold if effective strategy is to influence acquisition, planning, and operations.