

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Naval War College
Current Strategy Forum
Newport, Rhode Island
Tuesday, June 16, 2009

Admiral Wisecup, thank you for your kind introduction. Admiral Roughead, professors and students, ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to be here today. In the short time since beginning work as the 75th Secretary of the Navy, I have been continually impressed with the dedication and talent I have found in our professional officer corps, starting with an exceptional CNO.

I have to tell you that I never dreamed I would be standing here when I began my naval service nearly 4 decades ago as a junior Surface Warfare Officer on the USS LITTLE ROCK right here in Newport. I didn't think I'd be standing here when I was on special sea and anchor detail passing under the two dollar bridge on our way to sea.

Early on, as a J.G., I saw the sacrifices and the differences that service members made every day to defend and serve our country. I carried that memory and the commitment to service I gained through all the years since, and through service as Governor and the Ambassador.

On Thursday at the Washington Navy Yard, I will rejoin the Navy at my public swearing in. I am proud of that first tour of duty on a cruiser, and proud beyond words to finally return home to the Department of the Navy.

I am glad to see this group and such strong participation and interest here, for as you think through important questions of our age, you represent the latest in a long, strong line. The list of notable Naval War College alumni reads like an honor roll of our history. Mahan, Nimitz, Halsey, Bliss and King each came here to Coasters Harbor Island on the shore of Narragansett Bay, and they were joined by many more whose contribution to history, and those contributions are invaluable, was that they served, and fought, and thought for the Nation they loved. For more than one hundred fifteen years, your intellectual product has been a powerful tool and has helped lead our Nation to prevail through two World Wars, in the "long twilight struggle" with Communism, and continues today.

The thought and the theory which came from here aren't relegated unused to musty shelves. What has made them so successful and so potent is that they are implemented by the unique combination of assets and skills that the Navy and Marine Corps bring. This Naval force is the most agile, flexible, and responsive force ever fielded. We are always forward deployed, always the away team, like the cop who walks the beat, ready to respond to whatever situation presents itself. Whatever the President needs, on behalf of this Nation, we've got the tools and we've got the talent to do.

Alfred Thayer Mahan taught here, and he taught about the importance of maritime presence in shaping world affairs. His seminal work, The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, has informed more than a century of strategy. But that strategy as carried out by the Navy and Marine Corps has proven adaptable and adjustable to meet changing world realities. If you had been in this room twenty years ago, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and made a thoughtful analysis of the challenges we would face in 2009, most likely every one would have been wrong. If you were to come back ten years later, in 1999, and do the same good, deep analysis, it would have still been more wrong than right. As you sit here today and think about and plan for the future, even after the most informed and analytical debate imaginable, the odds are, over the next two decades, we will face threats and challenges which we cannot see today.

And that's why the Navy and Marine Corps, working together as a team is so critical to our Nation's security. We are nimble. We are responsive. And we don't have to go get our gun – we carry it with us: aircraft on deck; missiles in the tubes; Marines embarked, with their gear, ready for whatever the need arises. When this country needs to reassure an ally or deter a potential adversary, we can do that. When our Nation needs to do the long, hard, unspectacular work of building partnership with other countries, we can do that. When America and the world need to respond to a humanitarian catastrophe, we can do that.

We can do all that because our equipment is flexible and fungible, because our forces have a zero land based footprint, and we can maneuver because our forces and their equipment are together. When we are ordered by the President to meet some challenge on behalf of our Nation, we don't have to negotiate or wait for permission to use someone else's soil. We move on the seas that we control.

The Navy and Marine Corps were created as an expeditionary force and we have remained so throughout our long, proud history. Being agile and expeditionary are in our DNA.

There are two vital components at any response: speed and staying power. Because we are globally deployed, we can be there fast. Because we are a self-sustained, expeditionary, maritime force, we can stay for as long as it takes.

Our forces also have the huge advantage of being able to converge or disperse to meet whatever situation or situations that arise.

National policy increasingly shows us the need for such expeditionary maritime force. As the United States draws down its presence overseas, we become less reliant on land-based forces outside the continental United States, while intensifying challenges around the world increase the necessity for our Navy and Marine Corps' fast and flexible capabilities.

Your deliberations take place at a crucial time. While we focus on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, we also must answer the call, very eloquently expressed by the Secretary of Defense, to look beyond the horizons.

We must not only meet the traditional security challenges posed by the military forces of other states, but also get ready for the important role we will play in the struggle against violent extremism. We are in the midst of a rapidly changing security landscape and increasingly complex world - - a world with rogue nations, failed states, insurgencies, and terrorist groups, and the danger of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons added to this mix. In light of these, I cannot think of a better theme for this symposium than considering how our Navy, and our country, can both meet future challenges and identify opportunities to promote a more stable world.

We have to be able to engage in irregular warfare, in more conventional scenarios, and the high-end asymmetric threats, while at the same time working to build trust as a deterrence to war. This is, and has been, the very definition of our naval forces.

Since its birth, the United States has been a maritime nation whose security has demanded a maritime solution. Piracy off the Horn of Africa, recently in the news again, reminds us of the 18th century Barbary Pirates and the threat they posed to our fledgling

nation. This concern was foremost on the mind of the delegates who met at Philadelphia to write a new Constitution for our young republic.

Armed with new national authority, the United States commissioned six frigates, built up and down the coast from New Hampshire to Virginia. Since those first six frigates, our enduring sea power has proven essential to countering threats, winning wars and furthering the interests of peace and prosperity worldwide. When nearly 75% of the planet is covered by water, 80% of its inhabitants live near the oceans, 90% of global commerce is transported by sea, and 95% of global communications go under the sea, we can see the immense importance of ensuring the freedom of those seas.

Today we are acutely aware of nations which may threaten the peace and stability of the world. But it is not only traditional nations which deserve our attention. Over the last few years, we have witnessed the emergence of new, non-traditional, but very dangerous threats. The weapons used by non-state actors are just as lethal as those wielded by traditional nation-states. Irregular warfare, insurgency, criminal activity, social unrest, and low-intensity civil conflicts have all proven as destabilizing as they are difficult to counter -- but countering these and preparing for them we must.

As you know and as you have been learning here we will face a world that is even more complex than the one today. Current trends in demographics, climate change, globalization, immigration, and resource availability will intensify the strain on many of the world's nations. Many of these strains will be felt most acutely by nations who are the least equipped to deal with them, and increase the potential for internal and external conflicts. Our Sailors and Marines will have to operate and succeed in the demanding environment of this future.

All this brings us back to, and reinforces the need for a maritime force which is powerful enough, inventive enough, and agile enough to do whatever the Nation calls upon it to do. To make sure we continue to have this force we have to do several things and I take all of these very seriously.

Our most important priority is to take care of our Sailors, Marines, and their families. As the President and Secretary Gates have stated, and as we all know deep down, America's greatest military asset are the dedicated men and women who wear the uniform.

They came from every corner of the country and all walks of life, yet they are bound together by a calling to the front lines of freedom.

Our Sailors and Marines are called on to execute many and varied missions. They provide persistent forward presence. They project power in many ways, and protect our sea lanes. They provide deterrence and, when necessary, fight and win. They serve as ambassadors of peace and partnership as they cooperate with foreign partners and allies, so many of who are here today, provide training and assistance, and deliver humanitarian aid and disaster relief. We have to ensure they receive the training and equipment they need to do their many-faceted jobs.

Even as our service members are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan alongside their fellow Soldiers, Airmen and Coast Guardsmen, the Navy and the Marine Corps team stands ready to answer our Nation's call from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of Aden. Despite our high operational tempo, our warriors remain resilient and motivated, and they are performing extraordinarily well around the globe. Never forget that your deliberations here inform the strategies that the graduates and their colleagues will use to lead these brave and committed young men and women.

Our country owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to all of those who serve, but none more so than our wounded who have paid freedom's cost so dearly. We have a solemn duty to ensure that when we send our forces to fight, they know that the wounded, ill, and injured will have the best medical care available for body and mind, and their families back home will receive the support they deserve.

While we rightly focus on those who serve, never forget the families and the critical, too often overlooked, role they play.

Next, we will continue to support our global commitments, while ensuring a force capable of meeting whatever the challenges we will face in the future. We will prepare for irregular warfare and hybrid campaigns, while maintaining our conventional warfare capabilities.

The Secretary of Defense has stressed rebalancing our force, reordering our priorities, and probably most important, resisting the thought process of the status quo. As he has said, we can't see the current world and our operations in Afghanistan and Iraq as aberrations which, when they have ended, will allow us to do what we were doing before.

Our greatest weapon is our ability to think and to adjust and to provide the means to meet whatever comes in the years ahead.

As part of this, we are working on the Quadrennial Defense Review, a major examination of our strategy, how we design and deploy our forces. Again, as Secretary Gates has said, we cannot have more of the same thinking simply presented in a new package.

Along these lines, the Department of the Navy will work hard on the acquisition process and on all existing programs to ensure that our Sailors and Marines not only have the equipment they need, but receive it on time and on budget. The practice of relying on overly optimistic cost estimates and schedules has to end.

Requirements cannot be ever-changing; design cannot happen at the same time as construction. The perfect cannot be the enemy of the good or the good-enough. Our suppliers have to have reliability and stability. We cannot continue to have ever-more complex and exotic programs at ever higher costs with ever longer schedules and ever fewer end results. To continue along this path is, in the end, disarming ourselves. No matter how capable these new platforms and systems are, at some point numbers matter and quantity becomes quality.

And, as with our doctrines and our people, our equipment has to be capable of shifting from one type of mission to another, and of being able to be used for any type of engagement.

Also, we must move towards greater energy independence ashore and afloat. Readily available energy is essential for deploying our Sailors and Marines around the globe in support of our Nation's interests. The energy for our missions needs to be more secure and less volatile. Since our operational flexibility and sustainability are directly linked to our energy supplies, energy reliability is a strategic concern for our force.

The potential disruption of our Nation's fuel supplies threatens our ability to perform our mission, and threatens the security of America.

We will move toward alternative energy for two reasons: security and diminishing our impact on the environment. We have made great strides in increasing our energy efficiency, reducing energy consumption, and capitalizing on renewable energy sources. Not only are we leading the Department of Defense in solar, geothermal, and ocean

energy, but 17% of our total shore requirements for energy are provided through alternative or renewable sources.

We have to do much more. We will have a comprehensive energy strategy to increase conservation, develop alternative energy options, and provide secure energy.

There is no doubt that our naval forces will always stand ready to fight for America. Through what you do here, we will remain on the cutting edge of the ideas needed to prevail against any eventuality.

The Naval War College has been a leading source of important strategic thought since its founding in 1884. Early in its history, naval strategists war-gamed a global conflict with Spain. The gaming floor here in Newport saw the Pacific island-hopping campaign, with its revolutionary amphibious, logistics and carrier operations, played out again and again during the 1920s and 30s. So often was this done, that Admiral Nimitz stated at the end of World War II that there were few surprises during the course of the war. The critical thought and tactical insight resident here in the War College proved instrumental in developing the Maritime Strategy that helped to win the Cold War.

Today, you students and War College faculty remain at the forefront of innovative thought and analysis as we confront a most demanding future.

As you listen to a most impressive array of speakers over the next two days—from top military commanders to some of the brightest minds in academic and policy circles—I think you will find the Current Strategy Forum to be enormously useful in understanding and confronting these challenges. This will be an interesting, exciting, and ultimately, very useful symposium. For our civilian guests, I ask you to take the insights you gain over the next few days back to your communities and to your colleagues so they can get a fuller idea of what the Navy and Marine Corps are doing for this Nation.

And to the War College students, I ask that you participate fully and listen closely, for this symposium is the capstone event of your stay here; an opportunity to assimilate the many varied disciplines of your educational experience. You will certainly need that education in the years ahead as you return to the fleet and your other duty assignments.

I want to thank the people in uniform for lending your time and talent to your country. I congratulate you upon the successful completion of this demanding course of study, and say that we look forward to your future contributions to the country. Each of

you has lived a part of the dream that is quintessentially America. We have to make sure that the country that ensures this dream is well defended. Godspeed.