

Australian Naval Institute

Headmark

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Front Cover: HMAS *Betano* during Exercise *Sea Eagle*, November 2005 (RAN)

Back Cover: HMAS *Parramatta* succeeding HMAS *Newcastle*, in the Middle East in October 2005 (RAN).

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- to encourage and promote the advancement of knowledge related to the Navy and the maritime profession; and
- to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas concerning subjects related to the Navy and the maritime profession.

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The Editorial Board seeks letters and articles on naval or maritime issues. Articles concerning operations or administration/policy are of particular interest but papers on any relevant topic will be considered. As much of the RAN's operational and administrative history is poorly recorded, the recollections of members (and others) on these topics are keenly sought.

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Style Guide. Articles and correspondence should be submitted electronically in Microsoft Word, with limited formatting. Relevant pictures or maps can be submitted electronically (if under 1 MB); otherwise they should be provided on CD.

Articles should ideally range in size from 3000-7000 words, but smaller articles will be considered, as will the occasional larger piece of work. Submissions should be sent to the Editor in the first instance. Articles of greater length should be submitted to the Sea Power Centre-Australia for possible publication as a Working Paper (seapower.centre@defence.gov.au).

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The ANI/Sea Power Centre-Australia will gladly accept book donations on naval and maritime matters (where they will either be added to the collection or traded for difficult to obtain books). The point of contact for access to the collection, or to make arrangements for book/journal donations is Dr David Stevens on (02) 61276503, email david.stevens3@defence.gov.au.

NOTICES/CORRESPONDENCE

Inquiry into Naval Shipbuilding in Australia

The Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee is inquiring into the future of Australia's naval shipbuilding and repair industry, its capacity to construct naval vessels over the long term, its economic viability and comparative economic productivity with other shipbuilding nations, and the broader economic implications stemming from the construction of large naval vessels in Australia.

The committee is seeking views from people interested in the future of Australia's naval shipbuilding and repair industry. The terms of reference are:

www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/fadt_ctte/shipping/tor.htm

The committee would appreciate receiving submissions by mid-February 2006. Submissions should be sent to:

The Secretary
Suite SG.57
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Tel: (02) 6277 3535
Fax: (02) 6277 5818
Email: fadt.sen@aph.gov.au

ANI Annual General Meeting 2006

The 2006 Annual General Meeting of the ANI will be held on Thursday 23 March from 1200 in Russell Offices: R1-1-D006.

For those members without Defence passes, they should contact the ANI Secretary, Lieutenant Andrea Argirides on 61276505 prior to the meeting to arrange for an escort to the venue.

The grand illusion of an Australian merchant marine

The article in the Winter edition by Commander Andrew Brown RANR on '*The grand illusion of an Australian Merchant Marine*' made some very valid points and was indeed much in line with what appeared to have been the thinking of the Department of Defence for some years. No doubt this was a valid policy so long as Australia was only involved in minor wars with only limited maritime threat implications for our nation.

However, times are changing and there would seem to be many other factors which need to be considered today.

Perhaps, firstly, the assertion that '*we don't expect*

to fight any more world wars' is a dangerous assumption, reminiscent of some attitudes after World War I, for today we have a major change taking place in the world strategic situation.

In East Asia the economic and military resurgence of both China and India is slowly creating new situations. Japan remains the world's second greatest economy and her armed forces will be able to expand rapidly whenever she so decides. Russia is slowly emerging from its economic collapse and will no doubt assert its position in due course. And the world's only superpower, the United States (US), overshadows all, and remains in a powerful position off Northeast Asia, an area of many tensions. And there are now five nuclear powers directly in East and South Asia. No-one can foretell the future, but a war of major proportions could break out in years to come, and Australia could, despite efforts to remain aloof, become involved.

In such a case Australia could be at major risk, particularly in the maritime area. As happened particularly in World War II (WWII), overseas shipping could be withdrawn from our trade to meet higher priorities elsewhere, or ships may not be readily available for charter, and Australia would need to be able to call on Australian-owned shipping to ensure essential imports and for many defence purposes.

The defence needs in such a scenario would be great, including requirements for tankers, amphibious transports, store, repair and depot ships, minelayers and auxiliary minesweepers etc. Many vessels, mostly small, would be needed for patrol, rescue and interception identification duties for most of our 70 odd ports.

Of course many of the current Australian owned or flagged ships would be unsuitable for military use, but noting what can be done with modern containers of all types, conversion of some would be quite possible (note the *Atlantic Conveyor* and other vessels in the Falklands Conflict and the use of tankers as vehicle/aircraft transporters in WWII).

It should be noted that in such a serious war, shipyard and dockyard capability could expand hugely as in the past. While past experience is not necessarily always valid, our shipyards in WWII converted, modified or fitted with armament some hundreds of ships. These included three liners converted to heavily-armed merchant cruisers and subsequently, in another major conversion, to Assault Landing Ships, and all this while repairing heavily damaged warships and merchantmen and constructing many of both types. We are now a much more technologically advanced nation with a

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much greater economy, but the availability of suitable vessels to convert would be crucial to success, and this points towards increasing the size and scope of our merchant marine.

But the defence needs are only part of the story. Whether we will face a serious threat in the future, or not, we are now one of the top 20 trading nations in the world, shipping some 600 million tonnes (say 6000 ship-loads) of our exports annually. Were a proportion of this huge total to be carried in Australian-owned ships such a carriage would 'value add' to these exports, thus assisting in reducing our serious balance of payments problem and aiding our economy.

There is now little interstate coastal trade and foreign vessels are taking a proportion of the trade available. Meanwhile our roads and railways are having difficulty in coping with the requirements and, while unavoidable, the costs to upgrade both these forms of transport are astronomical. And the serious road toll in human lives continues, often involving heavy transport vehicles, a proportion of whose loads could be transported by rail or sea.

We are one of the few countries to be blessed with almost direct connections by sea between all of our major centres of industry, and sea routes require no maintenance and negligible update costs for navigation. And yet this form of interstate transport is now hardly used.

Additionally, crew sizes in the few remaining Australian-owned vessels are now down to the average of those of OECD countries. Our ports are much improved in efficiency. There is comparatively little industrial unrest. And our international trade, particularly in commodities, has grown greatly.

What would be the advantages in developing our merchant marine?

- A share in our overseas transport would be beneficial and aid the economy overall, with a proportion of the huge transport value flowing back to Australia and 'value adding' to our exports.
- An increase in interstate shipping would ease the pressure on our roads and railways.
- An increase in Australian shipping would lead to an increase in local ship repair, ship management, ship provisioning and even shipbuilding and insurance with clear benefits to employment and the economy.
- In any future major war involving our nation, Australian-controlled shipping would be needed to support our Defence Force and to ensure essential supplies reached Australia.
- A healthy merchant marine is required to be able to produce skilled mariners to man our many pilot and port services included in our approximately 70 ports - now a serious problem.

- A strong merchant marine would provide a source of partly-trained personnel to help man our navy in time of war (as proved so valuable in WWII).

And the disadvantages? On the assumption that, given suitable incentives, capital would come from the private sector, there would be some Government outlay on infrastructure and perhaps some temporary loss of taxation.

There therefore seems a strong argument that this matter should be addressed to set in place taxation, crewing, flagging, port infrastructure, and other measures to encourage Australian business to re-enter this field. We have a splendid Maritime College, excellent innovative naval architects who lead the world in some forms of ship design, some fine shipyards, and the example of several small countries with high standards of living including Norway, Denmark and Sweden, who have created great merchant fleets.

There would appear to be every reason for a maritime nation like Australia to follow the lead of Scandinavian and other countries and develop its merchant shipping in a major way. This will need an understanding of the overall value to the nation by all involved with maritime affairs, and a concerted Government initiative to set in place the necessary parameters to encourage Australian commerce and industry.

*Rear Admiral Andrew Robertson, AO DSC RAN (Rtd),
Senior Vice President, Navy League*

The Young Turks II - where we see the Navy in the next 20 years

I congratulate the next generation of Young Turks on their article in the previous edition. While I disagree with much they say, they exemplified the values Navy holds dear, by having the courage to stand in front of their peers, and a retired Chief of the Defence Force (CDF), a couple of retired Chiefs of Navy (CN), and other retired senior officers, to give their views; this is to be encouraged and supported.

My disagreement with some of their suggestions relates solely to bureaucratic processes and the restructuring of the Australian Defence Organisation that has occurred over the past ten years, which will impede many of their recommendations. I suggest that the comments which follow also apply to the retired naval community, who write to the Minister for Defence or to the Chief of Navy offering suggestions.

Since the Tange Reorganisation of the 1970s, there has been increasing centralisation of the central policy making areas of the Department. This centralisation began in earnest in the late 1980s with

the creation of the then Development Division which absorbed the single Service force development areas, and which continues to this day with the new Capability Development Group headed by a 3 star officer.

The Defence Efficiency Review (DER) and the associated Defence Reform Program (DRP) in the mid-1990s, caused the greatest disruption to the single Services and the powers and responsibilities of the Service Chiefs. While the aim of minimising administrative costs and overheads is laudable, there are sound reasons why the three Services are organised and operate differently. Prior to the DER, the Service Chiefs were responsible fully for the raise, train and sustain of their Service in both the operational and financial sense. Under the DERP the financial aspect has been lost. The Head of the Defence Personnel Executive manages (controls) not only military salaries but also recruitment. So where the Young Turks suggest that Navy should take action with regard to changing the focus of recruiting, allowances etc, this is outside the control of CN - he can only 'influence' what happens.

Similarly for Navy's force structure; it remains opaque to many of us what influence Navy actually has in deciding its own future, rather than the centralised Capability Development Group focusing on developing a seamless Australian Defence Force that ignores the myriad of single-Service activities and operations the Navy undertakes; or the civilians in the Strategy Group - where strategy via White Papers and Defence Updates determine force structure.

Under the DERP, Navy Support Command was rolled into Support Command Australia (SCA), which later became part of the Defence Acquisition Organisation (reintegrating acquisition and logistics), and which then became the Defence Material Organisation. Again, when in the past Navy directly controlled its logistic budget on priorities determined by CN, which in turn were based on the CDF's readiness requirements, funding priorities are now determined by the 'supplier' of the goods, rather than the operational user.

I recall the difficulties faced by the Navy logisticians when the SCA was created and 'run' by the Army. Senior Army officers in the SCA Headquarters had difficulty understanding the practical fact that when navies deploy, they have to take the majority of their logistic support with them, both to increase their range and endurance, and because it might not be possible to airlift spare parts to the nearest port if a breakdown occurs. This is different to the Army, which had still to deploy to East Timor, and was used to throwing forgotten items onto a truck to following Army units deploying on exercises around Australia.

Similarly for both research and development and

interaction with maritime industries, the Navy can only attempt to influence what happens. The Defence Science and Technology Organisation controls its budget and notwithstanding the extensive administrative processes and consultation with customers (the three Services), their spending on tasks directly relevant to Navy priorities remains opaque. With the privatisation of the naval dockyards, Navy influence on shipbuilding and ship repair and refit is minimal at best, firstly because industry interaction is undertaken by the DMO, but because the dockyards will only, naturally enough, make decisions on a sound commercial basis, not on a Navy wish list.

And the list goes on. The actual funding that the Service Chiefs control is miniscule when compared to the attributed costs for each of the 'Defence outputs' (ie surface combatants). What is amazing to those of us watching this awful matrix management model where the operator of the equipment controls very little, is that any output is actually delivered at all. I suspect this has more to do with corporate memory and loyalty to their Service by those out posted to some of these 'joint' Groups.

My point to this mini diatribe? This is the reality that faces those of us who rotate through Canberra. Well meaning advice, whether it comes from the Young Turks or from the retired community often does little to help the Navy and is often a considerable burden to the relevant staff officer who has to craft a written response. While the suggestions proffered range from good and sensible to the ridiculous, all are based on the assumption of CN having full control over the entire budget for delivering naval capability, and the ability to direct and control everything relating to the Navy. Unfortunately as I hope I have demonstrated, this is not the case.

What this means is that if in many cases Navy cannot control its destiny but only influence it at best, and this can only be achieved through cogent, well argued explanations of what Navy does and why, where it wishes to be in the future, what it wants as part of its future and why, and how it plans to get there.

The staff in Navy Headquarters provide this strategic direction, buttressed by the work of the Sea Power Centre-Australia (SPC-A), to provide easily digestible, but rigorous, analysis and explanations of naval and maritime issues. It should also be the role of this Institute to raise, discuss and consider the difficult issues, particularly those the SPC-A cannot examine publicly if the issues are seen to be outside current government Defence policies.

Sutekh

Naval aviation and the legacy of empire

In the 1920s Britain was engaged in a weird experiment with its armed forces. Trenchard, as Chief of the Air Staff, had propounded his doctrine of the Unity of the Air. That is to say, if it was military and it flew, it would have to be flown by the Royal Air Force (RAF). As a result it provided a Fleet Air Arm (FAA) of squadrons for which the Admiralty provided the aircraft to be flown by RAF aviators, for the most part, and ground crews provided by the RAF. A few naval personnel were allowed to fly and, while embarked in carriers, wore naval uniform. Their RAF contemporaries in FAA squadrons were given naval ranks while embarked in carriers. When squadrons were landed and operating out of airfields ashore RAF members reverted to their Air Force ranks and naval members were given RAF ranks. It was a weird system and, as David Divine has observed, the extraordinary thing was that it worked at all. In these circumstances the shore based Long Range Maritime Patrol aircraft which had been provided by the Navy in World War I (WW I) were wholly operated by the RAF. Naval aviators had gained a lot of tactical knowledge and experience in operating against German submarines, including, for example, painting aircraft white to make them less visible to submarines.

So it was, that, in 1937, when the FAA was transferred back to the Admiralty all the aircraft and squadrons became Naval Aviation again. Except for the LRMP which were retained by the RAF. Why? Whatever reasons are advanced for the shore-based LRMP to remain with the RAF it seems to me that the RAF wanted to keep them to be used as bombers in a secondary role. Bombing was a central tenet of RAF thinking in the twenty years between the wars. It was an article of faith that 'the bomber will always get through'. And the RAF's hypothetical threat was with France, which it was going to bomb into submission. This is why I believe the RAF retained the LRMP and Coastal Command. Unfortunately in the twenty years between the wars the RAF had forgotten all the lessons learned by the Navy in WWI, and they had to be relearned in World War II (WWII).

This explanation, and the dominant role played by Britain in Empire defence matters explains why all the component parts of the Empire adopted the same structure as their own. Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and India, for example, adopted the same arrangements for their own LRMP. Since the end of WWII Canada has had its experiment with combining the three Services into one and has assigned the LRMP to Maritime Commanders. India alone has transferred LRMP to the Navy.

For a country which boasts in its National Anthem that 'we are young and free' it is a strangely defeatist attitude to adopt. And the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), for all it expressed dislike of naval aviation and carriers is curiously dependent on United States Naval Aviation for the three aircraft which form its combat triad, the P3 Orion, the FA 18 Hornet, and the F111 (with its long wing Bomber/Naval Aviation version).

In the meantime, Australian naval aviators with years of experience in maritime operations and who could well slot into LRMP are paid off or retrained in other roles when their flying days at sea are over, while the RAAF directs its personnel into its LRMP squadrons where they have to learn about maritime operations from scratch. It seems to me a high price to pay for our former membership of the British Empire. This is not to be taken as a criticism of the RAAF members of the LRMP squadrons, who are, I am sure, good warriors who do their best. It is a criticism of our strange thinking about military aviation and who does what in the ADF.

Commodore Allan Robertson, RAN (Rtd)

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Maritime security in a future Asia-Pacific

*S Enders Wimbush**

This article was originally presented as a lunchtime speech at the Maritime Forces Pacific Conference 'Maritime Security Challenges in the Asia-Pacific Region in the Post-9/11 Era', 6-7 May 2005, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

When I imagine future Asia-Pacific (or Indo-Asian) maritime security landscapes, I am struck by three defining conditions that are constantly in motion and that converge in different ways to produce effects that we are unlikely to anticipate.

First, every day brings new evidence that the number of actors that have the power to alter the shape of the maritime security landscape is growing dramatically. Moreover, the capabilities that these new actors command are also increasing. I am referring not simply to the actions of terrorists with access to nasty weapons - a trend that is certain to increase - but also to schoolchildren with access to the Internet, who are proving especially adept at hacking into even the most secure computer networks.

Second, things are happening faster. Time is compressed on this new maritime security landscape. Many things account for the acceleration of events, including more rapid and widespread communications, globalisation of technologies, and the information revolution. It is hard to imagine the tempo of change slowing in the future. It is easy to imagine it accelerating even more.

Moreover, it is becoming increasingly difficult to understand the forces that shape the Indo-Asian maritime security landscape through traditional analytical filters. What discipline does one use to assess the impact of maritime piracy or the competition for energy, for example? Economics? Demography? History? Anthropology? Strategy? Law? Clearly, to understand these issues and so much else in the Indo-Asian maritime security realm, one needs to employ a broadly multidisciplinary approach.

Third, there is a profound interactive quality to events in the Indo-Asian maritime security world. These interrelationships more and more frequently result in local phenomena and forces cascading far beyond their points of origin.

The Indo-Asian maritime security theatre illustrates all of these dynamics. If one imagines what the Indo-Asian maritime world looks like 20-30 years from now in light of these forces, it is easy to imagine some extremely difficult challenges for

national defence and military planners. Nothing that I have heard in the last day and a half inclines me toward the belief that we should attempt to understand this dynamic future security environment only by projecting today's visible trends in a linear fashion into the future. Rather, I suspect that this region's maritime future will be distinctly non-linear. It will be full of critical uncertainties that, if resolved, might create very different trajectories and outcomes than anticipated by the conventional wisdom. Wild cards - forces or events that might radically alter the shape of the landscape, such as of the 9/11 variety - are not certain, but are we so naïve to believe that they also are unlikely?

It is of course impossible to predict the future. Nevertheless, we can do some things that might bring some of its possibilities to light and suggest how we might get there. I have been reflecting on the last day and a half's discussions with an eye toward identifying questions that might help us tease out the characteristics and dynamics of possible alternative maritime futures. Here are eight of them. Each question suggests the outlines of an alternative future that we might wish to explore, with a view toward identifying where we might need new operations and doctrine, new or enhanced capability requirements, and new kinds of alliances or relationships.

1. Will the United States Navy be there?

The first critical uncertainty on the emerging maritime security landscape is the future of the United States (US) foreign military presence. The ongoing Global Posture Review leaves uncertain where US forces will be situated, and with what capabilities and size. Most people agree that the US Navy (USN) will remain essential for maintaining maritime security in the Indo-Asian theatre because only it has the capacity to deal with the growing number of interactive maritime security challenges across the entire region and, indeed, the globe.

Yet estimates of the number of US warships have been falling continuously. The military effectiveness of each ship appears to be increasing with advances in information processing, targeting, and communications - indeed, the Navy is trying to leap technological generations with almost every new ship class - but at some point the paucity of warships will affect regional evaluations about the robustness of the US foreign military presence.

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Every reduction in the number of USN ships available to operate in the region will influence other actors' strategies in important ways. It will not be lost on others that, in some cases, the decline in the fleet's visibility will lead to a decline in its ability to deter threats, dissuade challenges, and assure allies and friends.

Future US military assets could easily prove insufficient in both number and capability to provide the expected level of visibility across the range of possible threats and contingencies. The USN already suffers in some core capabilities - for example, in shallow water operations and demining - that represent particular sets of skills and experience that are fast disappearing. Moreover, the US and other navies are still trying to develop an optimal doctrine to respond to the new strategic environment, one characterised by capabilities-based rather than threat-based planning. It is easy for me to imagine that the world 20 years from now could well be characterised by military contingencies that will stretch the USN to its limits and, perhaps, beyond.

How do we think about an Indo-Asian world in which the USN is a less robust - and therefore, perhaps, a more reluctant - participant?

2. Role of non-US navies: who else will be there?

These strains on the USN highlight the need for regional partners to cover resource gaps, provide local, cultural and human intelligence, and generally augment the USN's ability to operate in Indo-Asia's forward regions. Yet, in the search for new partners, the US and its allies will almost certainly discover that they must engage with a range of new, unfamiliar and perhaps adversarial players. This is already happening with India, but can it happen with Vietnam and Russia? Can the Philippines and Indonesia be re-engaged in ways that reflect the demands of the new security environment? Which foreign governments will allow the USN to conduct operations from bases on their territory, and will these partners have the capacity and will to conduct joint maritime military operations with the US? What interoperability issues will arise, and what will it take to resolve them? Currently, only Thailand in Asia is mostly inter-operable with the US. Who will pay for it?

In the Pacific, the evolving US-Japan alliance is a major source of uncertainty.¹ Japan, Asia's strongest military power and America's strategic anchor in the region, is slowly inching toward a new security identity whose outcome is still uncertain. Strategically, Japan has yet to decide what it is, what it wants to become, and how much it is prepared to invest and sacrifice to get there. How this plays out will have a profound impact on the way all of us think about maritime security in East Asia.

Strong forces in Japan seek to enhance its power and to free Japan to play a wider security role throughout Asia by amending Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, which prohibits the Japanese from projecting military power. Some Asians welcome a more visible and militarily assertive role for Japan, despite Japan's recent history as their adversary. Their view that Japan has become 'a normal nation' and must play a larger role in Asia underscores, perhaps, their concern that American power and influence may be receding.

Countervailing forces in Japan, caused in no small measure by the country's bad demographics - the population is among the world's oldest, and getting older - are pushing towards something like a 'fortress Japan'. In this case, Japan would possess sufficient military power to deter adversaries' opportunism, but would focus mostly on rebuilding its economic strength, a process that almost by definition entails greater accommodation of China.

One option, assuming a comprehensive risk- and burden-sharing alliance with the US, may no longer be its preferred one. Yet, American planners, perhaps mistakenly, tend to see this as Japan's default position.

If the US were to lack a strong naval presence in Japan, and absent revolutionary progress in sea-basing, it will be forced to project power from Guam or Diego Garcia, from the continental US, or from some other distant location. Even if the US retains its significant military presence in Japan, these forces would still be at a strategic distance from South and Southeast Asia and the vital sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) that run through Indonesia, where many strategists believe the most challenging maritime security challenges and probable military contingencies will occur. Increasingly, the USN will need new basing, logistics, and intelligence nodes, from South Asia to the South China Sea, to have a sustained and visible presence and be able to respond quickly to contingencies in this region. No such infrastructure is in place today. To the contrary, the arch stretching from Japan to the Persian Gulf is notable for the almost total absence of US forward presence.

3. What happens when 'soft' problems acquire 'hard' triggers?

In late 2002, I led the development of a tabletop environmental disaster exercise between the US and India that examined how American and Indian forces - defined broadly as military and non-military assets - could cooperate to address a severe environmental security crisis, in this case simultaneous energy spills in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. After several days of deliberations, the teams concluded that we lack a comprehensive picture of where the capabilities to respond to an oil

spill reside in the region, or knowledge of what chokepoints are available to exploit these capabilities.

- No organisational structures and few communication channels exist in the region to support a multilateral regional response to a major oil spill disaster.
- We would need to manage the regional political sensitivities about our motives that would invariably arise from any consequence management operation.
- Who pays is not clear. Unlike US law, Indian legislation does not require the parties responsible for the disaster to pay for the clean up.
- The legal constraints to cooperation could be significant and a source of disagreement between us. International maritime law complicates the ability of our militaries to jointly prepare for and respond to a regional oil spill. In addition, the scenario exposed differences in what our militaries consider permissible joint activities under various conditions
- Many bilateral, trilateral, and regional disaster response agreements exist between and among the Southeast Asian states, but these agreements are not connected to each other. More importantly, none of the existing disaster response agreements nor ASEAN's crisis management mechanisms include India and the US as signatory members.
- Intelligence related to preventing maritime terrorism and information on ships moving in and out of the Indian Ocean Basin are not widely shared.

Now let me tell you what I left out. The two oil spills we considered in this scenario were not accidents. They were caused by precisely the symbiosis of pirates and terrorists; a scenario that both the Indian and American participants in the game I just described believed to be highly plausible.

In my view, the future is almost certainly going to see what we think of as soft issues like environmental security breakdowns converging with hard issues like terrorism or a combination of terrorism and piracy. Moreover, they could easily go beyond the obvious energy spill scenarios. The growth of maritime commerce and tourism likely will increase the risks of the seaborne spread of infectious diseases, disruptive non-indigenous species, and other environmental problems. The invasive species issue presents an especially insidious problem for maritime commerce, as most foreign organisms arrive by ship - typically inside cargo containers or ballast tanks, or clinging to ship hulls. It is just a matter of time before terrorists or hostile elements deliberately attempt to

manufacture such threats. The reason I cite our exercise with the Indians is because it illustrated how poorly prepared we are to deal with maritime security disasters that we do understand. How well will we do with future threats that result from a convergence of soft and hard factors that we do not anticipate or, even worse, can't imagine - especially those that are widely dispersed, multiple and simultaneous?

4. Is a comprehensive regional architecture for maritime security cooperation possible?

China's unprecedented engagement in Asia's key multilateral structures, particularly ASEAN and the ARF is an important issue, but it is not clear to me that Chinese involvement will actually make these organisations more effective in addressing maritime security challenges. Unfortunately, regional fora like ASEAN and APEC still lack military capabilities and a willingness to take on tough maritime security challenges. Can we envision these organisations evolving in the direction of more assertive engagement in maritime security problems of the kind I just described, including developing a credible military component? Alternatively, can we imagine the creation of a new security architecture for Asians to address these issues, one that would actually have power and the mandate to use it? What role would the US have in such a structure, which I suspect most Asians would want if only to balance a powerful China? What role would China accept in such an organisation if it perceived that US participation was intended to dilute its influence?

It is entirely conceivable that mutual suspicion and competitive ambitions on the part of both China and the US could impede their working together to develop a comprehensive security architecture for the maritime Indo-Asian region. I doubt that any architecture can be created with the US in the lead that appears to be aimed at restraining China, which is how I suspect the Chinese would view such an effort. Similarly, despite China's growing economic and military power throughout the region, I doubt that many regional states, especially India and Japan, will back any comprehensive arrangement that cedes additional authority and influence to China.

What if no larger regional maritime security architecture can be built? If these scenarios prove correct, then we have to consider the possibility that future maritime security arrangements in the Indo-Asia region are likely to be contextual, bi- or perhaps tri-lateral, limited in scope, based on objectives that may be more tactical than strategic, reactive, and of limited duration. How enduring and effective can maritime security be under these conditions? Would this kind of world change our objectives for maritime security or the processes we

pursue to achieve it?

5. How will military strategies reflect energy strategies?

We now have a fairly clear picture of the emerging supply and demand curves for energy, which is already becoming one of the principal maritime security concerns throughout the Indo-Asian region. Without revisiting all of the available data, allow me to focus on four broad trends that frame this issue.

First, Asia is fast becoming the world's largest consumer of energy. Within Asia, China will soon consume the lion's share. Second, most of this energy, and certainly virtually all the increase in demand, will have to come from outside the region given where the hydrocarbons are located. Third, 'outside the region' means, principally, from the Persian Gulf. The Gulf alone has the reserves to supply Asia's growing thirst. And fourth, almost all Asian countries will face multiple energy fronts, as opposed to one or two today. For example, in a decade, India's gas will come from three or four directions - from the Middle East, Central Asia, Bangladesh and Southeast Asia. Or, in the case of Japan and China, its energy will be coming from all directions - the Middle East, Central Asia, the Russian Far East, Southeast Asia, Africa, and possibly western China. The shift to gas, which is the preferred fuel among Asian states, changes the strategic geography in Asia by giving energy consumers new choices. But this shift also reinforces the importance of traditional and potential oil suppliers - the Middle East, Indonesia, and the Caspian Sea, since gas tends to co-locate with oil.

What kinds of military strategies will states develop to ensure an uninterrupted supply of energy to themselves in the Indo-Asia environment and, perhaps, to deny an uninterrupted supply to their adversaries in time of crisis? What kinds of hedging strategies can we imagine, and what are their maritime components? I anticipate that for Asia, the links between maritime security strategies and energy security strategies will become increasingly interlinked.

Competition - and potential conflict - between China and India is already well advanced. Thinking in both states on how to secure energy security in the event that the international energy market fails to adjudicate supply and demand effectively, a breakdown that both sides believe is possible, tends toward zero-sum solutions backed by military might that can only be described as neo-mercantilist. Moreover, both states clearly view energy strategy as part of a larger geo-strategic competition, as the current struggle to gain proprietary access to Iran's energy and the intense competition for access to the northern Caspian region demonstrates.

China's forward deployments constitute a new kind of presence, from the South China Sea to Gwadar on the Pakistan-Iran border. They are part of this game of energy chess. Along the way, they include military airstrips on Woody Island, the Kra Canal project in Malaysia, airstrips and supporting road networks in Myanmar, surveillance facilities in Zedekyi Kyun, commercial and naval bases on Haingyi, and of course Gwadar. In my view, and in the view of many Indian strategists, Beijing's new deployments are primarily related to China's quest for energy security. Candid Chinese planners say the same thing.²

China is perhaps the most systematic in its search for energy security, but we should understand that all major Asian economies suffer a profound dependency on energy imported, mostly by sea, from very long distances. New relationships - such as the recent evolution of a growing India-Japan nexus with a strong naval component - are already beginning to reflect this reality. Energy strategies, and the military strategies that mirror them, should command our attention. How would we plan, for example, for a crisis in the Persian Gulf that reduced energy exports to East Asia or India? Even a short break in supply to these increasingly energy dependent states would surely propel national leaders into action - perhaps military action - to prevent catastrophic damage to their economies.

6. How do we plan for asymmetric competition and the tyrannies of distance and time?

We tend to speak of future maritime military contingencies in the Indo-Asian region in the parlance of today's conventional military operations. Yet, in almost any exercise we conduct that explores future military contingencies in this region, they are usually highly asymmetrical. Future adversaries - such as peer competitors, smaller states, and non-state actors - are very unlikely to match US military capabilities, but they likely will try to employ their technologies in unique and creative ways that magnify their effectiveness against us.

Anticipating such tactics will be difficult, and will require a comprehensive understanding of these actors' cultural predilections and operational doctrines. It will perhaps be even harder to determine when the balance of power has shifted, or at what point their anti-access strategies have put at risk the US ability to project power.

Thus, understanding vulnerability in this environment requires devoting more resources toward assessing how an adversary might employ those weapons it already possesses or soon will acquire.

Many maritime contingencies might be slowed, mitigated, or even prevented by a rapid response.

Yet the difficulty involved in projecting land, sea, and air power over the long distances inherent in Indo-Asian operations makes such a quick reaction extremely difficult. We need to analyse how to better overcome the tyrannies of distance and time.

7. Can we manage cascading effects?

In the next two decades we may anticipate continued growth in the seaborne shipments of energy products, the rapid expansion of deep seabed mining, further adoption of containerised shipping, and the continued rise of super ports as commercial hubs for trans-shipment and deliveries. Maritime shippers increasingly have concentrated their traffic through major cargo hubs (also known as 'super ports' or 'mega-ports') because of their superior infrastructure. In the US, 50 ports account for approximately 90% of all cargo tonnage. The two largest container ports in the world, Hong Kong and Singapore, manage over one million forty-foot containers per month. Analysts forecast the volume of global container traffic to double in the next 20 years.

The rising use of mega-ports and mega container ships has lowered the costs and improved the reliability of maritime commerce, leading firms to rely increasingly on rolling inventories and just-in-time deliveries. These trends illustrate the increasing interconnectedness between the core elements of the global economy - trade, finance, and communications - but also its vulnerability to disruption. An interruption to these flows would affect the maritime shippers, other transporters (especially trucking and train companies), and the suppliers, retailers, and other firms located further up or down the supply chain - as well as their workers, their families, and the end consumers deprived of these goods. The economic losses from a non-violent labour dispute that closed all US ports on the west coast for only 11 days in 2002 amounted to billions of dollars. That same year, a simulation concluded that a deliberate terrorist attack that succeeded in shutting down America's major seaports would deprive the US economy of an estimated \$58 billion in revenue.

Have we thought seriously about how to manage the likelihood that even a small provocation, if well timed and placed, could set off cascading consequences that quickly spiral out of control? How do we secure the maritime economy under dire circumstances? How do we think through the dimensions of this complex problem?

8. What if the China we see is not the China we get?

So much of our thinking about future maritime security is predicated on a view of China, especially its possibilities and capabilities, that is no more than

a snapshot in time. Perhaps most dangerous for good strategic planning, we tend to assume that China's profound economic growth will proceed unabated into the future and, consequently, that it will become an ever more powerful and influential regional actor, perhaps even a new Asian hegemon.

Indeed, this may be the path China follows during the next several decades. But I would like to propose that the case for thinking about a China that is not strong, but fragile, is equally compelling. The China I see is crisscrossed with intersecting, converging and occasionally colliding fault lines. These include profound resource vulnerabilities - not just energy, as suggested earlier, but water, which is becoming a heavy brake on China's agricultural development and social stability. One needs only to consider the implications of the drop in the water table below the Plain of Beijing, China's breadbasket, to get a sense of the proportions of some disturbingly downside scenarios. China's future political stability has to be questioned, especially when it becomes clear to everyone that the archaic political structure dominated by the Chinese Communist Party can no longer accommodate the more dynamic demands of China's society and economy. Regional tensions - north/south, coastal/inland, urban/rural - are all developing apace of China's economic growth. So, too, are tensions between China's ethnic regions, some of which require a sustained or growing military presence to ensure stability. Wildcards abound. For example, think of the potential impact of HIV/AIDS, which has reached epidemic proportions, on economic productivity and social stability: a danger fuelled by the interactive stimuli of blood selling, the sex trade, and narcotics use, and accelerated by up to 160 million indigent Chinese who move continuously throughout China. Or a financial wildcard. No one has yet come up with a plausible model for resolving the problems associated with China's banking system. Many experts anticipate a profound crisis at some point in the future. China suffers from myriad other difficulties. My point, simply, is that if planners only posit a world in which China's strength and not China's weakness is the defining characteristic, we might get the maritime security picture very wrong.

Conclusion

To sum up, let me restate some of these questions:

- What might the Indo-Asia maritime security environment look like in the event of a less robust USN presence or participation?
- How should we think about the roles and responsibilities of other Indo-Asia maritime forces if this should happen?
- How should we think about the possibility that

soft issues like environmental protection might converge with hard triggers like piracy or terrorism (or both combined) to create exponentially more difficult challenges?

- How might we pursue Indo-Asian maritime security if multilateral options are ineffective or impossible to create?
- How should we think about the intersection of energy and military strategies?
- How might the possibility of asymmetric military contingencies in the maritime world affect our planning?
- What kind of intervention strategies can we imagine in crises that have the potential to cascade quickly beyond our ability to control or recover?
- What if the China we are planning for turns out to be a chimera?

My job is to ask how alternative futures might arise and where they might lead; where conflicts might occur; how the interests of different actors might be challenged; what kinds of strategies actors might pursue to achieve their objectives; and what might happen along plausible pathways to those futures. The Indo-Asian maritime security world is pregnant with the kind of possibilities people who explore the future find most appealing. We do not have to predict the future to know that the dynamic universe of important questions relating maritime

security it is broader and deeper than the static universe that dominates so much of our thinking.

¹ I discussed this further in 'The Shape of New Asia' *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 2004.

² China's 'String of Pearls' and Chinese and Indian views of their energy strategies are detailed in Juli MacDonald, Amy Donahue, and Bethany Danyluk, *Energy Futures in Asia Final Report*, Booz Allen Hamilton prepared for Director, Net Assessment, Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense, (Booz Allen Hamilton, November 2004)



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The fleet-in-being: a concept best forgotten?

Commodore Jack McCaffrie, AM RANR*

The 'fleet-in-being' concept has a long history. Its use was evident in the Peloponnesian Wars in the 4th century BC, with both Athenian and Spartan navies refusing combat at times, when living to fight another day seemed to be a superior approach.¹ The first use of the term, however, appears to be in what came to be known as the Battle of Beachy Head in 1690. Despite the controversy associated with that battle and misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the term ever since, both the term and the concept itself have been used on many occasions. This article defines and explains the concept of a fleet-in-being, examines its historical use and discusses briefly its applicability to Australian maritime strategy in the 21st century.

As defined by the United States (US) Department of Defense, the term fleet-in-being describes a fleet (or force) that avoids decisive action, but because of its strength and location, causes or necessitates counter-concentrations and so reduces the number of opposing units available for operations elsewhere.² In addition, the Royal Australian Navy's (RAN) keystone statement of doctrine, *Australian Maritime Doctrine* talks about a 'force in being' derived from the historical fleet-in-being concept and itself being an important variation of the concept of sea denial.³ It goes on to describe how a weaker power, by avoiding a head-on encounter with a larger enemy and preserving its strength, can limit the capacity of the stronger power, by forcing it to divert its own forces or to provide some protection for them.⁴

In describing the concept, the contemporary maritime strategist, Professor Geoffrey Till, argues that a weaker or less ambitious force commander can, by avoidance, keep most of his forces away from danger.⁵ But, he stresses that this is not meant to encourage inactivity and that the concept relies for its success on 'being pursued with verve'. He points out that the inferior fleet-in-being must keep the superior force or fleet preoccupied.⁶

This can be done actively by fighting to live another day, or less satisfactorily, passively by merely surviving. Writers, such as the noted early 20th century historian Sir Julian Corbett and more recently, Till, emphasise the active variant of the fleet-in-being concept. They have argued that it can involve attacking enemy trade or coasts, otherwise harassing an enemy or even evading enemy attempts to bring on a decisive battle.⁷ Corbett's view was that the key to naval defence was mobility, not defence of a position.⁸ He also pointed

out that a fleet safe in a fortified base simply left open to the enemy 'the ulterior object, which is control of sea communications...'.⁹

By definition, the fleet-in-being concept is associated with the inferior fleet or force and is therefore usually associated with the defensive approach to operations. The key to understanding its application is that while it cannot gain sea control for the inferior fleet, it can prevent the superior enemy from gaining it.¹⁰ Furthermore, as Till also argues, one should at all times aim to maintain the strategic initiative; something which is not the preserve only of the superior fleet.¹¹ This would include a continuous watch for opportunities to damage the opponent. In Till's words,

*an active fleet-in-being strategy would seem to offer the outnumbered fleet better prospects than either complete passivity or the kind of naval death-ride against a superior foe that the High Seas Fleet was rumoured to have been contemplating in 1918.*¹²

Corbett takes a similar line, noting that the defensive should be seen as the complement to the offensive – not its antithesis. For Corbett, therefore, the value of the defensive should be in the opportunity that it could provide for offensive operations elsewhere.¹³ This is very much in line with Corbett's thinking that the normal condition of war is for the command of the sea to be in dispute and that an inferior fleet could hold it in dispute through an essentially defensive attitude.¹⁴

This approach is also consistent with the approach of the Royal Navy (RN) today. Its current doctrine states that the threat posed by a fleet-in-being can keep a superior force from establishing desired levels of sea control by diverting forces to other tasks, such as blockade or containment.¹⁵ The RN thus sees an active fleet-in-being strategy as an exercise in sea denial.

Mahan took a somewhat dismissive view; perhaps influenced by his ambitions for the United States Navy (USN) to become a great navy. He saw the value of the fleet-in-being and the mostly defensive strategies associated with it. But, he argued that it was a posture that should never be adopted voluntarily, but only accepted if imposed by the threat from a stronger fleet. For example, he argued that the function of a navy in defence of the home coastline (if the homeland was reduced to a naval defensive) was twofold. 'If stronger, it will seek, and if possible compel, a battle; if weaker, it will try to draw the enemy away and to divide his forces by threatening other strategic points or vital interests.'¹⁶ He also claimed that for it to succeed,

the stronger fleet had to make a mistake.¹⁷

Mahan did not reject outright the value of the fleet-in-being concept; rather he rejected excessive claims made on its behalf. For, example, as a matter of principle, he rejected the assertion that the presence of an inferior fleet would or should always prevent action by an opposing superior fleet.¹⁸ He repeatedly quoted Napoleon's saying that 'War cannot be made without running risks.'¹⁹ Mahan had the view that risks had to be assessed and accepted where it made sense to do so.

Undoubtedly the most enthusiastic proponent of the fleet-in-being concept was Vice Admiral P.H. Colomb, RN writing in the last years of the 19th century. Much of his argument was founded on Admiral Lord Torrington's conduct of the Battle of Beachy Head in 1690 and on the USN's conduct of aspects of the Spanish-American War of 1898; both of which will be described in greater detail below. In this latter case, Colomb argued that the approach and presence of a significantly inferior Spanish squadron had 'controlled all the (U.S.) movements for thirty three days'.²⁰ It was perhaps unfortunate for Mahan that his own navy should provide (in Colomb's eyes at least) such a clear example of the fleet-in-being concept at work.

The Battle of Beachy Head

At this point it is worth turning to the battle that brought such attention to the fleet-in-being concept. The French operation that led to the Battle of Beachy Head was associated with the move to restore James II to the English throne and was mounted to coincide with the absence of King William III, who in June 1690 had joined his army in Ireland, campaigning against French forces. There was a general expectation in France that the landing of French troops in England (or in Ireland) would encourage a general uprising, led by disaffected elements in the population.²¹ William's absence left Queen Mary governing as Regent and left England's defence mainly in the hands of a hastily called out militia.²²

In mounting the operation, the French intended approaching the Channel with more ships than the British and Dutch allies could muster, defeat the allies and then land forces in Torbay, while other elements sailed to the Thames to support a planned insurrection.

Some months before the battle, in January 1690, Admiral Lord Torrington resigned his position as First Lord at the Admiralty rather than be associated further with what he knew were totally inadequate preparations for dealing with the French. Naval finances and victualling were in a state of collapse and no one in Whitehall seemed to care much about them.²³ That said, Torrington's constant complaints about his difficulties had reduced his King's

(William III) trust in him, to the extent that the Earl of Nottingham, the Secretary of State, became his preferred naval adviser (Nottingham had previously been a member of the Admiralty Board).²⁴ Having relinquished his position on the Board, Torrington returned to sea as Admiral of the Fleet.²⁵ He returned to a Fleet that was experiencing great difficulty in being made ready for the year's anticipated activities.²⁶ Indeed, Torrington threatened to resign his seagoing position too when his ships were not ready for sea by early May.²⁷

Separately, in March 1690, Vice Admiral Killigrew was ordered to escort a convoy to Cadiz and thence to various ports in the Mediterranean. It is said that he had with him 16 ships 'fit to lie in a line'.²⁸ He was also instructed to use part of his squadron to observe the French Toulon-based fleet. He was to follow them if they moved out of the Mediterranean. Killigrew's progress was delayed enroute to and in Cadiz, to the extent that the Toulon ships got as far west as Gibraltar without being seen by him. Advised of their movements, Killigrew sailed for Gibraltar, and came up on the French, to the north, after they had left an anchorage at Ceuta.²⁹ Killigrew followed the French to the north, but apparently with little comprehension of their plans to join the Fleet in Brest. In fact, he returned to Cadiz to arrange more convoys and by the time he reached Plymouth Sound, the Battle of Beachy Head had been fought.³⁰

The only other force Torrington could have expected to count on was a squadron of six ships, under Sir Cloudesley Shovel, which had been sent to prevent the French from controlling the Irish Sea - but was too small to do so.³¹ In the end, Shovel's force was separated from Torrington by the combined French force, which sailed from Brest.

There have been many arguments as to the actual numbers of ships on both sides at the Battle of Beachy Head, but little or no dispute that Torrington was significantly outnumbered. Most recently, Nicholas Rodger has claimed that on the day of battle, the French had 75 ships of the line against Torrington's force of 56.³² Colomb, on the other hand, reported that Torrington found himself leading some 50 English and Dutch men of war and 20 fireships on the 23rd of June at St. Helens.³³

There is also some argument as to when Torrington first knew of the presence of the French force under Vice Admiral Comte de Tourville. According to Colomb, before Torrington returned to the Fleet in May, there had been no watch kept on the port of Brest. Still, by the 22nd of June or the 23rd at the latest, Torrington knew what he was confronting.³⁴ On the 23rd of June the French force was noted as being 'at the back of the Isle of Wight'.³⁵ At about this time too, efforts were made to contact both Killigrew and Shovel, so that they

might join and reinforce Torrington's force. Ultimately he was reinforced only by a small number of Dutch and English ships. On the 23rd of June also, Torrington wrote to Nottingham pointing out that the lack of preparedness could not be blamed on him, Torrington. Nottingham did not share Torrington's fears and provided an optimistic outlook in a subsequent letter to the King.³⁶

Finally, on the 25th of June, Torrington had his first sight of the enemy.³⁷ Here again, argument ensued as to the relative strength of the two forces. Torrington, the man on the spot, was not believed when he reported the French strength. Nottingham preferred to accept reports from observers on the Isle of Wight.³⁸

Over the next few days Torrington tried to close with the French but was frustrated by contrary and light winds. Significantly, the French showed no immediate inclination to bring Torrington to battle. At this stage, Torrington wrote to the Earl of Nottingham bemoaning his predicament and wishing for Dutch reinforcements. These came in the form of three Dutch and two English men-of-war.³⁹

On the 26th of June Torrington again wrote to Nottingham, noting the French caution, expressing relief that the French had not taken advantage of their superiority to fight and indicating that he was not keen to fight them with the uneven odds. He feared that he must lose and thereby leave England open to depredations by de Tourville and the French forces. Torrington's preferred course of action was to watch the French, get to the west of them and join up with Killigrew and Shovel.⁴⁰

He did, however, indicate that he would fight if ordered to do so. To the point in this exposition on the 'fleet-in-being' Torrington hoped that by staying in contact with the enemy while avoiding action, he would prevent the French from achieving their ends. As a last resort, he expected to have to retire to the east and shelter behind the Gunfleet shoals to the northeast of the Thames.

With the confidence that comes from geographic safety, Nottingham believed that Torrington was overestimating the French strength, continued to rely on the estimates of his Isle of Wight observers and believed that only Torrington's pessimism, defeatism or treachery could account for his reports.⁴¹ Nottingham's reply to Torrington also showed some ignorance by fearing what might happen to Killigrew and Shovel if de Tourville detached a force to deal with them. Torrington had always considered this possibility and planned to take advantage of it to attack the remaining French force.⁴²

Nottingham's reply also included an exhortation by the Queen for Torrington to fight, and according to Colomb, it showed no appreciation of the broader

implications of a major naval defeat. This reply was accompanied by the dispatch of Admiral Russell, an adviser to Nottingham, who was given secret orders to supersede Torrington if he refused to fight.⁴³ When he received his orders on the 29th of June, Torrington had been pushed further to the east – to Beachy Head – and he immediately replied that he would fight as ordered, but did not agree with the direction.

On the 30th of June Torrington formed his ships in line of battle ready to fight. They were to windward and bore down on the French line. As expected, the English and Dutch were hit hard, with the Dutch, in the van, absorbing most punishment. Eventually Torrington anchored to allow the ebbing tide to carry the French forces out of range. The French then pursued Torrington for four days, and abandoned the chase when the Allies had reached Dover, but not before more Allied ships were lost. In a speech to the House of Commons in November of that year, 1690, Torrington explained his reasoning and actions by saying, 'Most men were in fear that the French would invade, but I was always of another opinion, for I always said that whilst we had a fleet-in-being they would not make the attempt.'⁴⁴

Nevertheless, a French invasion was the general expectation after the battle and there was some consequent panic in London and on the south coast.⁴⁵ Perhaps surprisingly, the French contented themselves with returning to Torbay, where they burned the small village of Teignmouth and were driven off by militia. They also destroyed a few vessels of little worth before returning to Brest.

With the French having little additional to show for their defeat of the English and Dutch force, Torrington's judgment appeared to be vindicated. Nevertheless, he was court-martialled. His defence was based on the argument that by fighting and losing, yet saving the fleet from total defeat, he prevented de Tourville from any large scale invasion by retaining the 'fleet-in-being'.⁴⁶ He argued that while the fleet, weakened though it was, still existed, the French could not afford to send the transports away to land their forces. He was acquitted, but it must be said that not everyone who has subsequently considered these events accepted Torrington's argument.

Mahan is the most eminent of the critics, arguing that it was de Tourville's lack of initiative and lack of transports that prevented him from taking advantage of Torrington's defeat.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Mahan argued that had Nelson been in de Tourville's position, the expectation of meeting Torrington's force would not have dissuaded him from attempting the operation against England.⁴⁸ By contrast, Colomb maintained that on the basis of a discussion quoted in Mahan's *Life of Nelson*, Nelson

would not have attempted any landing without first having put the defending force out of action.⁴⁹ More recently (in the 1930s) Admiral Raoul Castex agreed with Mahan's assessment, claiming also that the French Government had lacked an overall plan for the operation.⁵⁰ Ehrman also contended that the French lacked sufficient troops and were further handicapped by sickness and a shortage of stores.⁵¹

The ultimately unanswerable question is whether the French could have contemplated significant landings on the English coast while the Allied Fleet, damaged but still 'in being' lay in the comparative safety of the unbuoyed shallows of the Gunfleet. Nevertheless, in assessing the value and validity of the fleet-in-being concept, it would be wrong to put too much emphasis on a single instance, such as the Battle of Beachy Head. Colomb, perhaps the greatest proponent of the concept, argued that more generally, descents on territory were common where no fleet-in-being existed and absent where such a fleet was capable of intervening.⁵²

The concept has a life

Despite the differing views on the eventual outcome of the Battle of Beachy Head, the fleet-in-being concept has surfaced several times in subsequent centuries. Most, if not all of these instances, have been accompanied by the same kind of controversy that marked consideration of the fleet-in-being concept after the Battle of Beachy Head. In the main, the controversy, or questioning, relates to the value of the inferior fleet and the value of the defensive posture associated with it. For proponents of the concept, the value of the inferior fleet lies in its capacity to keep control (or command) of the sea in dispute and thus prevent the superior fleet from gaining that control.⁵³ For detractors, the weakness of the concept lies simply in that it is based on the inferior fleet, with all the limitations that may flow from that.⁵⁴

In the Seven Years War, for example, Corbett pointed out that the French avoided decisive operations likely to lead to a decision and limited themselves to active defence, lasting through five campaigns in which they prevented the reduction of Canada by the English. They lost ultimately, but this use of an inferior fleet-in-being did prolong the conflict and provided opportunities for French forces to make gains in other ways.⁵⁵ Even with ultimately superior naval forces, Britain suffered losses to the French early in the war. Britain also continuously feared an invasion by the French.⁵⁶ This caused the RN to devote significant forces to blockading French fleet bases, while also being engaged in protecting trade, attacking French trade and supporting troops in Canada and elsewhere.⁵⁷

Subsequently, at the end of the 19th century Vice

Admiral Colomb, RN used the then recent Spanish-American War to argue for the ongoing validity of the concept.⁵⁸ He pointed out that in 1898, even the existence of a much inferior Spanish squadron had greatly disrupted US landings in Cuba. Indeed, news that Admiral Cervera was crossing the Atlantic brought the US Fleet to Key West and caused the Secretary of the Navy to halt all troop movements.⁵⁹

At the beginning of the war, the Spanish Navy was both numerically and materially inferior to the USN; a position that only worsened during the brief conflict.⁶⁰ It is perhaps best illustrated by the ease with which Admiral Dewey destroyed the Spanish squadron in Manila Bay on the 1st of May.⁶¹ But, from the outset, the USN failed to monitor the movements of Spanish ships in the Atlantic, thereby providing an advantage to the Spanish 'fleet-in-being'.

Colomb argues that this war confirmed the utility of the fleet-in-being concept. He points out that an utterly inferior Spanish squadron that could not contemplate facing even a detachment of the USN Fleet, caused major disruption to US plans, essentially through ignorance of its movements and the consequent uncertainties generated in the minds of US decision-makers. Colomb argues that these factors led to the redistribution of US naval forces, the lifting of the Cuban blockade and the temporary cessation of all seaborne troop movements.⁶²

An example of the impact of the Spanish 'fleet-in-being' led by Cervera is the order by Secretary of the U.S. Navy John D. Long, issued on the 3rd of May. It stated that 'No large Army movement can take place for a fortnight, and no small one till we know the whereabouts of the four Spanish cruisers and destroyers.'⁶³ According to Colomb, this order was issued at a time when Cervera was estimated to be some 3,000 miles away. Almost a month later, on the 31st of May, the Secretary of the Navy again directed that the military expedition would have to await confirmation that all four Spanish cruisers were in Santiago.

Ultimately, the US achieved its objectives in Cuba with little or no actual interference from the Spanish Navy. Yet, there can be no doubt that the uncertainty generated by the mere existence of a much inferior Spanish Navy squadron significantly affected US plans. Colomb's claim for the value of the fleet-in-being in this case annoyed Mahan, who according to Till '...dismissed this as an aberration; Cervera's squadron may have had this effect, but probably it should not have done.'⁶⁴

Mahan was no supporter of the fleet-in-being concept, mainly because of its defensive (and so for him inferior) nature. But, in spite of his disdain for it, he did acknowledge that it had a part to play in naval strategy. He stated that

*Therefore the aim of the weaker party should be to keep the sea as much as possible; on no account to separate his battleships, but to hold them together, seeking by mobility, by frequent appearances, which unaided rumour always multiplies, to arouse the enemy's anxieties in many directions, so as to induce him to send off detachments....*⁶⁵

Torrington would surely have agreed.

Mahan had an ally in the French Admiral Raoul Castex. He deprecated the concept and was especially scathing of attempts to exaggerate its significance.⁶⁶ He was dismissive of French Navy concerns very early in the First World War over the transport of troops from North Africa, while the German warships *Goeben* and *Breslau* remained at large in the Mediterranean.⁶⁷ Only in the face of strong Army demands did the French Navy agree to the troop movements and even then it provided a very powerful protective escort.

Castex also noted that although the German High Seas Fleet acted as a fleet-in-being throughout the war, it was a fleet 'whose ultimate influence on events was minimal'.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Castex pointed out that the existence of the High Seas Fleet did not prevent activities such as the transport of the British Army to France, under the cover of the RN Grand Fleet. That is certainly true, but in this case, the High Seas Fleet was not actively engaged in trying to prevent the troop movement. It was not in Mahan's terms, 'keeping to the sea as much as possible' and so was hardly providing the kind of distraction to the enemy of a true fleet-in-being.

By contrast, in the furore following the sinking of the *Lusitania*, Admiral Scheer determined to use his submarines to reduce the numerical superiority of the Grand Fleet. This was a fleet-in-being tactic in that at some point changed odds would make acceptance of a central or decisive battle more acceptable.⁶⁹ The main outcome of this approach was to be the Battle of Jutland, which however, did not prove decisive in any way favourable to Germany.⁷⁰

A similar approach was planned for a time by the Imperial Japanese Navy in the lead-up to the Second World War. The IJN had for some years been working on a plan to destroy a USN fleet steaming across the Pacific. The essence of the plan was to destroy the small USN forces already deployed in East Asia and then intercept and ambush the main fleet in Japanese waters.⁷¹ According to the Japanese planners, for this to succeed, the Japanese fleet had to be at about 70% of the USN fleet strength at the time of the major battle. This was to have been achieved by forcing a series of engagements, using submarines, aircraft and other units during the trans-oceanic transit.⁷²

Consciously or otherwise, the fleet-in-being concept has continued to feature in naval thinking,

even in recent times. Admiral Stansfield Turner, in considering the prospects of a war in Europe against the Soviet Union, noted that amphibious assault would be a secondary consideration because the USN could not risk losses in tasks other than sea control, until sea control was established.⁷³ Essentially, this is a response to the Soviet Navy fleet-in-being. The Soviets believed that as long as their fleet remained intact, then NATO would get little value from an expensive main fleet.⁷⁴

But does it have a future?

Whether the fleet-in-being concept has a future will depend largely on the extent to which the issues that distinguished it in the past may continue to apply. Historically, the fleet-in-being concept has been associated with navies or fleets that have been at least temporarily inferior. This inferiority has in the past been identified and measured mainly in respect of numbers; numbers of ships, guns or (much more recently) missiles, for example. It has also been associated with a measure of relative quality and has included intangibles like the availability of intelligence and the potential for alliance support.

In the future, the measures of quantitative and qualitative inferiority will remain relevant, the more so as for many navies, costs will limit their fleet sizes and capabilities. In turn, this will increase their potential to field inferior forces in a variety of scenarios. The more intangible measures will be as important in the future, if not more so. The availability, or otherwise, of intelligence, in its contemporary guise of information dominance, will be a crucial determinant of inferiority and superiority in maritime operations. It will be linked with interoperability, today's equivalent of alliance support, to categorise those navies able to take advantage of technological development and having the capacity to operate fully compatibly with other friendly forces.

Historically, too, the fleet-in-being concept emerged and thrived in times of greater operational simplicity. Until the early part of the 20th century, threats were limited to the oceans' surface, or from the shore and in both cases were of very limited range. Close blockade was possible and engagements at sea, though often chaotic, occurred at very slow closing speeds. Inferior fleets could opt to decline battle, either by remaining alongside or if at sea, by keeping the weather gauge.

Today and into the future, the inferior fleet faces far more complex and challenging circumstances. Threats can emerge from under, on or above the sea and from the shore, and from much greater ranges than in the past. Equally significantly, these threats can now materialise very quickly. They include of course, surface to surface missiles, air to surface

missiles and long-range torpedoes. These threats also make close blockade impractical in many circumstances. The nature of contemporary and likely future threats suggests that any fleet that is significantly qualitatively inferior (not to mention quantitatively inferior) will find it increasingly difficult to come to terms with the superior force. The intelligence capacity, sensors and weapons of the superior force will ensure this. The limitations of single purpose ships, anti-submarine warfare frigates for example, could also contribute to this inferiority. Consequently, historic options such as those proposed by Torrington at Beachy Head (observing and providing a distraction) may no longer be effective for the inferior force.

In the past, also, most if not all navies, including even the most powerful, have found themselves in positions of inferiority and have resorted to fleet-in-being tactics. The future is likely to be the same in this respect. Undoubtedly, there is no navy in the world that could place the USN in an inferior position now or in the immediate future. Nevertheless, taking account of both the propensity for the USN to be dispersed throughout the world and of its gradual decline in numbers of ships,⁷⁵ even it will not be able to guarantee that it will not find itself (or a part thereof) in an inferior position somewhere, sometime. Any such inferiority will be first manifested in numbers of ships, not in relative quality or in the intangibles. One exception to this statement, however, might be littoral operations, at

least until the advent of the littoral combatant ship (LCS). In such operations, the USN weakness in mine warfare could well see it qualitatively inferior in some parts of the world.

In its future operations, the RAN may expect to operate either as part of a coalition force or independently. Depending on whom its coalition partners prove to be, the RAN could find itself in an inferior position relative to some opposing force. Operating as part of a USN-led coalition maritime force, the RAN is least likely to find itself in an inferior position. On the other hand, if the RAN were to lead or participate in a regional navy coalition, the prospect of being an inferior force is more likely to arise. Operating independently, the RAN is even more likely to find itself in a position of inferiority, noting that it continues to struggle to field a surface combatant force of more than 12 ships. No navy plans to be 'the inferior force' but, in some instances, the RAN must be prepared to adopt a defensive approach – acting as a fleet-in-being – until circumstances allow an offensive approach to be taken.

The kind of force inferiority which could lead to the RAN adopting a fleet-in-being strategy could emerge in several ways. It could be manifested in numbers of ships and aircraft and their associated weapons. It could also be manifested in the relative capability of the weapons, noting that regional naval developments might well mean that by 2020, the RAN will no longer enjoy superiority on the

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basis of advanced systems. Each of these possibilities could also be exacerbated by the potential for RAN forces to have tasking conflicts which would prevent the necessary concentration of forces.

The need for a fleet-in-being approach might also emerge because of an inferiority in the intangibles mentioned earlier; information dominance and battlespace awareness, associated with network enabled operations. The RAN's capability in these aspects of maritime warfare will depend on both future levels of investment and on the nature of future maritime threats in our region. These threats may come from both state and non-state sponsored organisations, either of which could also apply asymmetric approaches or weapons to add to the RAN's difficulties. Finally, a fleet-in-being approach might also be forced on the RAN by difficulties in integrating potential coalition force members because of inadequate interoperability of systems.

The likely nature of future maritime operations might also impact on the need for a fleet-in-being approach by the RAN. There is some debate on this matter. Geoffrey Till reminds us that Mahan and Corbett still matter and that navies will still have to be able to win at sea.⁷⁶ One other writer notes, in what is a now common theme, that littoral operations will play a more important role than the quest for open-ocean sea control.⁷⁷ Till also argues, however, that today's naval problems are different, involving piracy, people smuggling and fisheries protection;⁷⁸ and he goes on to identify potential maritime threats such as; conflict between users of the sea, maritime crime, resource degradation, involvement in other people's quarrels and deliberate action by hostile countries.⁷⁹

What all this suggests is that the navies of the world are facing expanding roles, with a difficult to manage combination of technologically advanced war-fighting and a growing list of constabulary operations. The difficulty will be manifest in the challenge of maintaining readiness for each of the roles. More important, in Australia's case, it will be manifest in a Navy that could be consistently overstretched in responding to operationally and geographically diverse tasking. Any kind of holding operation to deal with any constabulary (or more likely) war-fighting mission would be an admission of an inability to bring superior forces to bear, at least initially. It would therefore be, in effect, a fleet-in-being approach.

There is, however, another aspect to the fleet-in-being; that in which a navy such as the RAN finds itself opposed to a well executed fleet-in-being strategy. This could involve, for example, the deployment of a foreign submarine to Australian waters, with the mission of distracting and

containing our forces rather than destroying shipping. Even if the RAN identified the nature of the mission, the submarine's rules of engagement might be imperfectly understood and it would be virtually impossible to ignore the threat implied by such a submarine presence. Would the RAN be guided by Mahan's expectation of audacious Nelsonian action, or would it be guided by the kind of caution shown by the USN and by its political masters in the Spanish-American war?

Much would surely depend on the nature and extent of the superiority enjoyed by the RAN and on the nature and location of the operation in question. Ideally, the RAN would have sufficient superiority (quantitative and qualitative) to allow it to conduct its mission while also dealing with the inferior force. If it did not, and if the operation was critical to national security, then caution may well be in order. Similarly, if the operation were to be conducted in a location in which the RAN could expect to maintain any initial superiority - perhaps through readily available reinforcements - then it could also assume a more audacious approach.

The success of the fleet-in-being concept lies in the skilful application of an inferior force; blending caution with the ability and willingness to seize any opportunity presented by a superior opponent's error. The best counter to it may comprise a similar blend; a determination to achieve one's objective together with a realistic appraisal of the inferior opponent's capacity to interfere.

Conclusion

The fleet-in-being concept has a quite long history, but it has not been universally accepted by naval and maritime strategists. Mahan has been a particular critic of it. Nevertheless, all but the most powerful navies in the world must consider the prospect of finding themselves in positions of inferiority at some time. As a consequence, these navies must be prepared to adopt, at least temporarily, the defensive measures associated with the fleet-in-being concept.

Australia's Navy faces particular circumstances which could generate the need for a defensive posture. The combination of military and constabulary tasks to be conducted over a huge area of potential operations, together with very limited forces, renders the RAN's position almost unique. While it will never set out to be the inferior force, the RAN would be unwise to forget the concept of the fleet-in-being.

* Visiting Naval Fellow, Sea Power Centre -Australia

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Supply Officer 2013 - Where are we going to be in 10 years time?

*Lieutenant Commander Lisa Batchler, RAN**

September 1994

Commander Boyd Robinson and Lieutenant Jayne Craig are sitting at their typewriters collating submissions that would form the basis of *Supply Officer 2003* (SO 2003). A number of workshops have been conducted and submissions sought from interested personnel as to what the future would hold for the Supply Officer in the next decade.

Junior officers were concerned about the length of time it took to get to sea; Lieutenant Commanders were bemoaning their 'gloomy' promotion prospects. Supply Officers were concerned about their future in light of the reduced crew numbers in future platforms and many were concerned that their expectations were not being managed.

Fast forward to September 2003

Commodore Boyd Robinson is about to take over as the Head of the Supply Community with Lieutenant Commander Jayne Craig as his trusty Staff Officer.

Commander Rod Robinson (working in Sydney) and Lieutenant Commander Lisa Batchler (working from Canberra) are conference calling and e-mailing to collate the submissions received for input to *Supply Officer 2013* (SO 2013).

Junior officers are concerned about the length of time it took to get to sea; Lieutenant Commanders are bemoaning their 'gloomy' promotion prospects. Supply Officers are concerned about their future in light of the reduced crew numbers in future platforms and many are concerned that their expectations are not being managed. So, what's really changed?

Having already conducted and successfully implemented *Supply Officer 2003*, the task of scoping the requirements and developing recommendations for SO 2013 was much easier than that faced by the team in 1994. Following the implementation of SO 2003, the SU PQ had a robust blueprint for the training and employment of its officers. The SO 2003 training continuum produced highly trained, professionally focused officers with a strong skill set in the provision of operational logistics and service at sea. The Head of Community oversaw the management of the PQ, and issues of concern were raised and addressed through the SAC.

Influences since SO 2003

There were, however, a number of influences that had affected the provision of supply support since

1994. In particular, the implementation of the Defence Reform Program and the Commercial Support Program fragmented the provision of military logistics and resulted in a decrease in employment opportunities for junior Supply Officers. The changes in the Defence Organisation including the formation of the Force Element Groups (FEGs) and the separation of the acquisition and in service support aspects under the Defence Material Organisation (DMO) changed the way that Navy supported its ships at sea.

Since 1994, there has also been a major increase in the number and scope of joint and coalition operations conducted offshore. Indeed, today's Supply officers can be found in all corners of the globe providing logistics support for deployed forces.

So, what did we do?

The Study was conducted using a SWOT analysis. The Team conducted a review of SO 2003 and a number of other relevant studies, and conducted workshops and interviews with Supply Officers and other interested personnel. This enabled us to analyse the internal environment of the SU PQ to determine our strengths and weaknesses. From this, we evaluated the wider ADF environment, in which we operate. This enabled us to identify a number of opportunities and threats in the timeframe to 2013. Analysis of these opportunities and threats enables us to formulate strategies to capitalise on opportunities and counter threats in the future.

Following the analysis, the issues were broadly grouped into the following areas which form the basis of the recommendations:

- Employment - how we employ our people
- Structure - building and sustaining the structure to support the Navy in 2013
- Career - how to manage the Supply Officers throughout their careers
- Training and Education
- Management - strategic management and corporate communications

The SO of 2003

The Study looked at the profile of today's Supply Officer to identify trends that might indicate areas where we can improve the management of our people. In 2004, Supply Officers are employed in a wide variety of positions, both at sea and ashore. The average junior Supply Officer is generally older

* Staff Officer Afloat Support, DNPR E&L

and more experienced than their counterpart in 1994, with a diverse employment history including previous ADF service for many. The SU PQ is 31% female, but this is most obvious at the lower ranks. Today's Supply Officer is also well educated, with many junior officers working towards postgraduate academic qualifications.

Strengths

Supply Officers make a significant contribution to ADF capability. The Charge Supply Officer role at sea is an integral part of the Command team and our people are valued for their contribution to operations, both at sea and in deployed shore support roles. In both supply specific, and whole ship duties, the Supply Officer contributes to the combat effectiveness of the ship.

In the joint environment, Supply Officers bring a wealth of experience in the issues unique to maritime logistics and contribute to the joint planning process. They also provide specialist logistics support to single Service and joint force elements on operations and exercises.

Supply Officers contribute to the planning and capability development process in areas such as Navy Headquarters and FEGs, providing specialist maritime logistics input. In general positions across the Defence Organisation, Supply Officers are highly valued for their broad military skills and general staff experience.

The defined structure and proactive management of the SU PQ produce a strong sense of culture and nurturing amongst our officers. This enhances the SU PQ's reputation as an employer of choice and attracts high quality candidates to the training continuum.

Weaknesses

Examination of the employment profile for Supply Officers has shown a decline in the technical supply skills such as Integrated Logistics Support (ILS). The focus on operational logistics has led to a gradual decrease in these other important skill sets. The increased emphasis on contracting in the ADF requires managers to possess skills in developing and managing contracts. There are many Supply Officers employed in areas with a contracting focus, and these people need to be equipped with the appropriate skills to manage the requirements.

Many junior officers feel that they have had insufficient seagoing experience before undertaking the Deputy Supply Officer (DSO) posting. The short period of Phase 2 training is not considered sufficient exposure to the core mariner skills required of a naval officer to ensure these officers maintain the appropriate credibility as a Deputy Head of Department (HOD) on their return to sea. This, coupled with the loss of positions in

establishments for junior officers, is also reducing the experience and skills in dealing with Divisional issues.

The structure of the SU PQ has an almost one-to-one ration for Lieutenants to Lieutenant Commanders. Clearly, this is neither manageable nor sustainable and must be urgently addressed. There is also a heavy demand for post Charge Lieutenant Commanders relative to the ongoing supply of officers with this skill set. A review of positions is required to ensure that the demand for officers of defined rank and skill set is commensurate with the numbers of officers available to fill the positions.

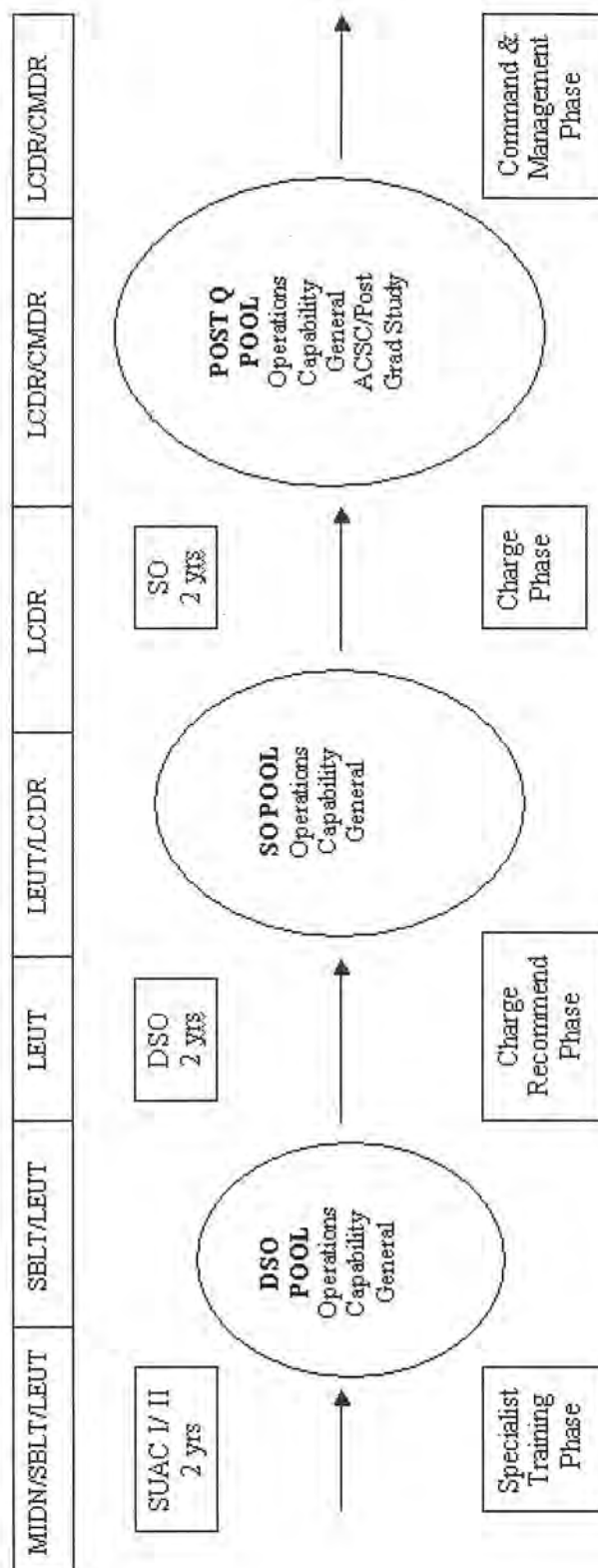
The Study revealed a loss of motivation towards Supply Charge for officers of Lieutenant rank over the past 10 years. Unlike the junior Supply Officers in 1994, today's Lieutenants do not necessarily feel the Supply Charge is part of their overall career plan. This is thought to be, in part, due to the increased emphasis on the DSO posting and board, and the attainment of the provisional Charge qualification. The report recommends that the focus be shifted from the DSO position to the Supply Charge position to balance the expectations and requirements of each posting.

There is a potential conflict, particularly for females progressing through the training continuum, between the key sea postings of DSO and Supply Charge and the childbearing years. The perceived rigidity of the continuum has influenced the decisions of a number of junior officers to separate prior to undertaking these postings. Encouraging flexibility in the continuum and adopting a whole of career focus to the management of each officer would incorporate a level of flexibility to enable officers of both genders to successfully balance their career ambitions with their personal and family requirements.

Opportunities

Over the past decade, Navy has increased its emphasis on joint operations in the littoral. Future platforms will support this capability and increase the requirement for 'sea based' logistics. The Supply Officer, with skills and experience in the provision of maritime logistics, is ideally placed to conduct the task group level planning and co-ordination required to support operations of this nature.

The migration of routine administration ashore may provide scope for Supply Officers to assume responsibility for logistics functions currently carried out by other officers. The reduction in crew sizes of future combatants may also provide opportunities for Supply Officers to assume administrative functions previously conducted by the Executive Officer (XO).



Threats

Future advances in technology coupled with the pressure to reduce crew sizes may threaten the provision of onboard logistics support. There are those who argue that enhanced communications will facilitate the removal of the logistics function from ships to a shore based support office. While this may be possible, the impact on the operational profile of the ship must be carefully considered before any decisions are made which could ultimately affect the capability of the platform to conduct operations.

Recommendations

So, what does all this mean for you? The final report made 106 separate recommendations across the five areas detailed above. Some of these recommendations are general about the overall PQ, while others relate specifically to actions required to address issues raised during the Study.

A brief summary of some of the main recommendation is provided. For further information and the complete list of recommendations, refer to Chapter 10 of the final report.

Employment

- Retain Charge Supply Officers and DSOs in Major Fleet Units
- Retain Supply Officers in operational and strategic level Headquarters
- Continue to deploy Supply Officers to command, and staff, LSEs in the AO
- Produce guideline to ensure appropriate employment of Supply Officers in accordance with their training and experience
- Continue exchange and liaison postings with the United States Navy to promote interoperability
- Develop a PQ of OPLOG for reserve officers to provide surge capacity in headquarters for operations and exercises

Structure

- Review the numbers for the SU PQ to ensure a sustainable structure based on the requirement to provide Charge Supply Officers at sea
- Conduct a full review of the SU PQ positions to ensure they fit the structure
- Designate positions according to the pool concept (DSO pool for those officers awaiting their DSO posting, SO Pool for those awaiting a Supply Charge posting and Post Q pool for charge qualified officers)
- Ensure that there is a realistic mix of positions and ranks in each pool to match people available for posting
- Designate each SU position as one of Operations Support, Capability Support and General for

ease of career planning

Career

- Endorse and emphasise the importance of Supply Charge as a fundamental requirement of the PQ
- Replace the term 'training continuum' with 'Professional Continuum' to encompass a whole of career focus
- Develop guidelines for managing career breaks and promote a culture of acceptance of career breaks and private commitments

Training and Education

- Review the content of SUAC, DSO and SO Desig
- Incorporate ILS and contract management training in early courses
- Review Competency Logs and Activity Logs
- Extend the WORSCP (Warrant Officers' Reduced Sea charge Program) to suitably qualified senior sailors
- Incorporate joint training in the Professional Continuum
- Promote and encourage post graduate study

Management

- Retain the SAC, increasing circulation of minutes and relevant issues
- Promote the achievements of our people
- Expand the Supply Officers' Development Program to all officers
- Investigate the feasibility of aligning with a professional organisation

The team in ADNPR(SU) is developing an action plan to ensure that the recommendations are developed and implemented. In the meantime, we are mailing out a copy of the report to every Supply Officer, and also those other officers and sailors who contributed to the Study. For the junior Supply Officers out there, this is particularly important - because you are the Supply Officer of 2013.

Fast forward to September 2013

Commander Rod Robinson RANR has just commenced his fifth stint of CFTS managing the Supply Officers' Development Program and consoling overworked DSOs. Lieutenant Commander Lisa Batchler is about take up a posting as Staff Officer to Commodore Ric Leahy, Head of Supply Community. Commander Morgan Coleman and Lieutenant Sam Dudley are reminiscing about the 'good old days' in DNPR E&L while collating submissions for Supply Officer 2023.

The Falklands Campaign - personal reflections

*Rear Admiral Jeremy Larken, DSO RN (Rtd)**

This is an edited version of a presentation given to the Institute at the Australian Defence Force Academy on 6 April 2005. The full text is available on the Institute's website.

The canvas for this paper is the Falklands Campaign in 1982, events encompassing some 100 days. My post was Captain of the 12,000 tonne assault ship HMS *Fearless*. In addition to command of the ship, I was Chief of Staff to the Commodore Amphibious Warfare (COMAW), the maritime commander for the military landings at San Carlos - the pivotal step in the re-possession of the Falkland Islands. As such, I was involved intimately with the planning of the amphibious tasks and the naval inshore operations around the islands, and the Commodore assigned me extensive elements of delegated tactical command authority within the amphibious force.

Drawing upon the sum of my previous command experience, I could scarcely have been better prepared for the challenges; nor could I have gone to this peculiar war either with better people or in a better ship. I was 43.

Scope

The Falklands crisis broke as an almost complete surprise for those who were to fight. *Fearless* abruptly found herself a major cog in a large and intricate yet flexible military machine that quickly became a crucial instrument of UK national will and government policy. Mine was not the hand that directed the strategic destiny of *Fearless*, much less the Amphibious Force. But I had everything to do with preparing the old ship for her starring role, a process that you will find stretched back a year. I was moreover responsible for all souls on board my ship, some 1400 for most of the period.

Since the quality of *Fearless's* preparedness proved crucial, I shall describe how this was achieved, before covering illustrative elements of the campaign itself. The paper concludes with a summary of principal lessons.

HMS *Fearless*

Fearless is an amphibious assault ship, now awaiting disposal. Completed in 1963, remarkably she remained active until 2002 as by far the oldest operational ship in the Navy, being passed over for Operation *Telec* on account of a terminally sick boiler - having been seen as quite an old lady aged nineteen at the time of the Falklands Campaign. A

key feature is a stern dock, the size of a substantial swimming pool. Into this fit neatly four large landing craft. At the forward end of the dock is a metal 'beach' which accesses various parking decks, similar to a roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) ferry. These accommodate vehicles up to battle-tank weight. Four smaller landing craft operate from davits. Much of the stern area above the dock is covered by a flight deck which, at a pinch, can operate without hangerage four large Sea King helicopters - and on one notable occasion in San Carlos a fully-armed Sea Harrier jump jet.

The operations areas further forward in the ship are exceptionally extensive. They incorporate three major command and control facilities. In addition to those required to fight the ship, there are headquarters for a maritime amphibious commander and for a land-force commander. These two guest commanders and their staffs act in an orchestrated relationship that does not concern us here beyond flavours of my personal involvement. The facilities themselves were obsolete in 1982, with the exception of the long-haul communications and - surprisingly - a closed circuit television (CCTV) system.

The permanent ship's company comprises some 600 men, of whom around 90 man a Royal Marines Assault Squadron that operates the landing craft. From the Falklands, six, but only six, to our grief failed to return. We could then accommodate, in reasonable comfort, a further 400 men as an embarked force that could land from *Fearless* direct. Somehow we expanded our hospitality to some 1,400, many short-term lodgers, throughout the campaign. For 36 hours before the San Carlos landings, we peaked above 1,700.

The bolt from the blue

The day was Thursday 1 April 1982. Having returned from her first operational deployment, *Fearless* was one week into a three-week shut-down period for maintenance. Much equipment had been opened up, nothing reassembled. Dark news of the invasion of the Falkland Island by Argentina distressed an evening meeting with some of my Heads of Department (HoDs). Although this was just the kind of situation the Amphibious Force and *Fearless* had been designed to redress, we did not imagine that dear old UK Ltd would have the 'bottle' for such a seemingly quixotic enterprise.

* Rear Admiral Larken, a submariner, was Captain of HMS *Fearless* during the Falklands campaign. Later (1986-88) he was Commodore Amphibious Warfare

We were wrong. Next morning I was awakened early by a call from my second-in-command, Commander John Kelly. *Fearless* had been placed on priority for war stores second only to the submarine strategic deterrent; perhaps I should hasten onboard. That Saturday between briefings I heard by radio Michael Foot, left-wing Leader of the Opposition, help Margaret Thatcher call the nation to arms in the House of Commons during what Alan Clark described as 'the most electric moment that I have experienced in that place, or it for many years I suspect, perhaps since 8 May 1940'.¹ On Tuesday we sailed from Portsmouth for the South Atlantic with the heaviest and most varied load the old ship had ever embarked. The Amphibious Commanders, Commodore Michael Clapp and Brigadier Julian Thompson, joined by helicopter in the Channel. The Amphibious Force gathered around us and we set course for Ascension Island, 4,000nm away near the equator and some half way to the Falklands. Many more ships, men and equipment were to follow in our wake.

Setting the strategy and driving the agenda

I took command of *Fearless* in May 1981 on relinquishing command of a squadron of nuclear attack submarines, a year to the month before the San Carlos landings. She was a sorry sight, hugely high and dry in a floating dock in which she was undergoing a major overhaul. The lead contractor was a struggling Tyneside ship repair yard, caught in a fixed-price Ministry of Defence contract, the successful completion of which might mean more work and survival.

The Royal Navy possessed two assault ships. Customarily, one had been active whilst the other languished in reserve status - from which she would in due course undergo an overhaul before once again taking the lead role. Thus *Fearless* was scheduled to take over from her sister ship *Intrepid* during the 1981-82 Christmas/New Year break. This would entail the transfer of substantial equipment and a number of specialist personnel. Taking stock with my new team on the Tyne, the chances of *Fearless* meeting this schedule looked frail. Such doubts had percolated to Fleet Headquarters. There was ominous talk of deferring the overhaul's completion and extending *Intrepid's* tenure as the active assault ship.

I needed to make early judgements and decisions that were realistic and responsible with an incomplete information base. I held two trump cards. First, to extend *Intrepid* would be highly unwelcome in manpower management terms - her people were earmarked already for new posts. Second, the shipyard would try desperately to complete *Fearless* on time, even if engineering standards were threatened - a danger we must

circumvent. Having done my utmost to galvanise and focus the admirably pragmatic Tynesiders, I needed to convince my own masters it was safe to plan *Intrepid's* timely release to reserve status. I knew that as time passed the *Intrepid* extension would fade as a practical option, and I would then more readily be assigned 'tiger-team' resources to deal with the serious critical-path deficiencies that I had no doubt *Fearless* would experience.

Establishing the credentials underpinning leadership

The role of an amphibious ship demands close Royal Marine associations; for instance one-sixth of the ship's company comprised Royal Marines. I knew little of this illustrious corps, but reputedly sailors and marines were not natural kin as colleagues afloat; no more were surface sailors ('fish-heads') and commando naval aviators ('junglies') intuitive soul mates.

This submariner was determined that *Fearless* should not become a floating colony of professional ghettos. To promote entente, I set up two weeks' training at the Royal Marines Training Centre at Lympstone, Devon for the sailors in *Fearless's* deployable platoon (diminutive great grandson of the Naval Brigades of WWI) in the rudiments of field-craft and infantry weapons, to be instructed by marines of our land-craft assault squadron, and went along myself. Having taken precautions to get fit, I was better placed than some of my toiling, sweating sailors in route marches, assault courses and other delights, establishing credentials both with them and my marines, and getting to know all concerned.

I also undertook a week of pilot training with the naval commando helicopter squadrons at Yeovilton. Awarded a huge pair of cardboard wings for successfully holding a helicopter in the hover for six seconds, my solid professional attainments were unspectacular. But here again I built partnerships that were to stand me in the utmost stead.

There were many other people to get to know at all levels. Whenever back with *Fearless* at South Shields, I explored the ship ceaselessly, often at unconventional times of day and night. In the mutual interests of timely completion, the shipyard agreed that sailors could undertake some hands-on work without union censor. Meeting my workforce of sailors engaged in basic engineering, ship husbandry and painting tasks, often boring, provided matchless opportunities to learn, to inform and to build mutual confidence and common purpose.

In my first command, a diesel submarine, my over-enthusiasm once led to what I judged to be a potentially mutinous situation. I averted the possibility with direct briefing of my people, and