

“Global Maritime Partnership” Gaining Steam At Home And With International Navies

By Geoff Fein

The 1,000 ship navy, an idea for developing a global maritime partnership, that is self-regulating and without treaties is catching on with international navies, according to the Navy's top service official.

For at least a year, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Mike Mullen has been touting the idea of a 1,000 ship navy as a way for countries to provide aid to each other in times of natural disaster, such as the Indonesian Tsunami in 2004, or to help with security issues such as piracy, weapons of mass destruction (WMD), drug smuggling or human trafficking.

"I have met with chiefs of navy [from] around the world, but what is also remarkable to me is that I have also met with chiefs of defense who are not naval officers. I have met with ministers of defense, they talk about this, they talk about it with an understanding of what the potential is here," Mullen told Defense Daily. "Again, all of this indicates to me that there is something here that's very significant in the world we are living in."

Earlier this month Mullen traveled to Venice, Italy, for a regional sea power symposium, where the idea of a 1,000 ship navy was discussed, he said.

"This concept has taken great traction with many countries and [their] navies, coast guards and harbor patrols," he said. "This has accelerated much more rapidly than I thought it would. I've scratched my head as to why this became so attractive so fast. I'm not sure I've got all that figured out yet, but part of the answer of that is the barriers for entry are very low."

Next week, Mullen will be heading out to the Western Pacific Naval Symposium, where he will bring his idea for a global maritime partnership to naval officials from Australia, China, France, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Korea, Russia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Thailand.

In September 2007, Mullen said naval officials from across the Pacific will meet again to discuss how to implement the 1,000 ship navy.

"There is a tremendous amount of activity that is ongoing in regions of the world right now to support this idea," Mullen said.

Mullen also noted that U.S. defense companies are taking an interest in the 1,000 ship navy concept.

"One of the indicators to the level of acceptance of this, contractors are starting business sectors in the 1000 ship navy. So they are starting to put their money...typically they don't do that just because Mullen says he has a great idea...they are going to want to know a little bit more about this," he said. "They have shaken this down quite a bit and they are starting to invest in it, to some degree, I don't want to overstate it, but they have clearly started to invest there."

While navies around the globe have varying levels of technological development, Mullen said it won't be difficult for them to participate in this global partnership.

"In my dealings over the years with countries...heads of navies, one of the things I always get asked is how they are going to stay with us technologically and investment wise," Mullen said. "The technology here is relatively inexpensive and it is pretty dramatic. A lot is based on AIS."

AIS, the Automatic Identification System has been mandated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) for all vessels over 300 metric tons, Mullen said.

"It's the wave of the future, and it's relatively inexpensive," he added.

AIS is a maritime variant of the Identification Friend Foe (IFF) system for aviation, Mullen noted. AIS provides information about a ship to other ships and coastal authorities, according to the IMO.

AIS will lead to a paradigm shift in maritime security, Mullen added.

"Years ago security at sea was based on hiding, you didn't get identified. In the new paradigm, I believe security at sea will be based almost exclusively on being identified, and then you chase the anomaly, you chase the movement you don't have visible to you at the time," Mullen explained. "I believe the future for security in the maritime domain [will] require everything that moves on the water to have some identification."

For navies with no experience with AIS, Mullen said other countries could step in and train them in how to set up their surveillance systems, show them how to track ships and how to report information.

"We have done that in a couple of places...we did this in the harbor in Liberia, for almost no

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investment, and all of a sudden Liberia has this view of the maritime domain that they have never had before in their life," Mullen said. "It has enabled them to provide security in their own harbor where they couldn't do it before."

One aspect Mullen is certain about, a 1,000 ship navy will not be U.S. lead. In fact he noted that the global maritime partnership will be self organizing with no alliances and no treaties.

The phrase that best describes the 1,000 ship navy is "free form," Mullen said.

"The 1,000 ship navy is dependent on knowing what it is we do at sea," he said. "We know the basic rules, there is a common bond [among] people that go to sea throughout the world."

The 1,000 ship navy will leverage all of that, Mullen added.

It all comes down to a matter of "looking for ways to say yes and not in ways to say no," Mullen said. "We are looking for ways to make things happen, to successfully carry out the mission, not for obstacles to prevent it."

As an example of how that common bond among navies can be leveraged to bring about a positive result, Mullen points to evacuation operations in Lebanon. Approximately 170 ships representing 17 nations were involved in evacuating their citizens from Lebanon during the Israeli-Hezbollah war. Once the evacuations were complete, the ships dispersed.

But the 1,000 ship navy would provide more than rescue operations and humanitarian relief efforts, Mullen said. It will also provide security and stability in the maritime domain.

"What I have seen in countries around the world as I have talked about this, is that security, that stability is about economics. The concerns we have which are WMD, piracy, weapons, illegal immigration, slavery, fishery violations, drugs, the common things we all face, this is a way to start to try to address those," he said.

Mullen added that these are issues that no single navy can handle on its own. "In addition to no single nation being able to do this alone, it

preserves as a primary principle here, the ability for a nation to protect its territorial seas."

One example Mullen cites is the efforts in the Malacca Straits, where Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore are all providing maritime security to the region.

Those efforts have paid off, as Lloyds of London has dropped its wartime insurance rates because piracy in the area has declined, Mullen noted.

"That had nothing to with the U.S., we have no desire to provide security for the Straits of Malacca," Mullen said. "But [for us], from a national and global interest, security in the Malacca Straits is very, very critical to us. That is an example particularly, in the case of Malaysia and Indonesia, these are countries we have emerging partnerships with."

Mullen also sees the 1,000 ship navy as a way to bridge friendships around the globe.

"It gets back to that bond, back to the understanding, and back to the idea that "with a ship or ships the ability to extend a hand in friendship and support as opposed to doing anything that might be threatening in any way shape or form," Mullen said. "And to build mutual trust and confidence."

Building trust and confidence is gained through sharing of information and the transparency of information, he added.

"Information in this needs to be unclassified, this is not classified information," Mullen said. "We improve trust, improve confidence, achieve situational awareness--a visible picture we haven't had before, and that's confidence building over time."

"It's back to scratching my head as to why this has worked, why it is headed in this direction so quickly, why so many people have been supportive of it," Mullen said. "It's those things that have emerged from this initial concept that have been so positive."

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