

Remarks by
Dr. Donald C. Winter
Secretary of the Navy
Surface Navy Association National Symposium
Hyatt Regency Crystal City Hotel
Arlington, VA
Thursday, January 17, 2008

Admiral Green, thank you for that kind introduction.

It is a pleasure to be back here, surrounded by those who devote their lives to defending a great Nation, and those whose labors have produced the most powerful Navy the world has ever known.

This year's symposium comes at a time when the United States Navy is celebrating a great milestone in our history—the round-the-world cruise of the Great White Fleet that departed Hampton Roads in December 1907 under the admiring gaze of its mastermind: President Theodore Roosevelt.

I am a great admirer of Theodore Roosevelt, as anyone who has seen his portrait hanging in my office can attest.

I am an admirer of his not only for his many colorful maxims about speaking softly . . . ; for his legendary courage as leader of the Rough Riders at San Juan Hill as part of . . . well, let's just say "another service" . . . ; but also for his record as a passionate advocate in support of building a stronger Navy—both as assistant secretary of the Navy and again as president.

When TR faced a Congress that was hostile to his ambitious shipbuilding plans, and members of Congress who opposed his astonishing idea to send 16 battleships—painted white—around the world, he was, as always, relentless, tireless, and passionate in making his case for the Navy.

He prevailed.

President Roosevelt's audacious idea of sending the fleet around the world was conceived in order to accomplish two major goals:

First of all, send a message to the world that America had arrived as a world power with global reach; and secondly,

Test and evaluate the fleet.

There is a legend that his admirals had repeatedly assured him that the circumnavigation could be done.

The former assistant secretary of the Navy—who always loved to verify things with his own eyes since the time he was a child—finally said to them: “Prove it.”

They did, and the surface Navy has been operating around the world ever since.

* * *

This experience from 100 years ago is still relevant to today because it provides us with three timeless lessons.

One, peace is achieved and preserved through strength.

Two, the Navy—more than any other service—must adopt a long-term perspective.

And three it is necessary to maintain public support for a strong Navy during peacetime.

When the Navy gets the call, it is too late to think about building the fleet.

The time to build is when peace reigns, and threats are but dimly perceived.

Maintaining a position of maritime dominance—which has been a cornerstone of U.S. military strategy since World War II—remains vital to our national security, to our position in the world, and to our ability to defend our interests.

* * *

Assembled in this room is an impressive gathering of those playing a leading role in maintaining the Navy’s readiness for the Joint fight.

Providing combat airpower, carrying out land attack missions, providing amphibious assault capability, providing military logistics, and executing strike missions at sea continue to be your *raison d’etre*.

As you are all well aware, we face variety of threats that range across the spectrum—from pirates to transnational threats to rogue nations to countries that may aspire to achieve peer competitor status.

Moreover, we face an uncertain future in terms of both geography and the nature of the threat we are likely to confront.

Such uncertainty necessitates the maintenance of a broad spectrum of both high-end and low-end capabilities that encompass blue, green, and brown water missions.

Some missions—counter-piracy, for example—can be satisfied with low-end capabilities.

But with 70 percent of the earth’s surface covered by water, 80 percent of the world’s population living near the world’s coastlines, and 90 percent of the world’s international commerce transported by sea, presence is more critical than ever.

Presence matters, and for low-end capability missions such as counter-piracy and many other maritime security missions, it may be the dominant consideration.

At the same time, some potential threats necessitate high-end capabilities that must match constant improvements in technology, as we have seen, for example, in Chinese submarines and missiles.

In the fleet of the future, we will need Ford class carriers with their global reach.

We will need Virginia class submarines, San Antonio class amphibious platforms, and other combatants with high-end capabilities.

And, we must balance capabilities and presence.

To achieve this balance, we will need more affordable ships such as Littoral Combat Ships that can be tailored to the variety of missions we must be ready to carry out in the vast littoral regions.

These diverse requirements call for more ships, but also the right ships to ensure that we have a proper balance between mission, platform capability, and presence.

Our shipbuilding plans for the future provide the balance we need.

They reflect a trade-off between operational needs, cost, and the need to maintain the industrial base over the long-term.

The health of the industrial base is a vital security interest to the Navy, which revolves around capital-intensive investments with long lead times.

We need government and industry to work together to achieve our shipbuilding plan in a transparent and deliberate fashion.

The Navy is making changes in the requirements process—trying to better define early in the process what we need.

But we also need industry to develop investment strategies that optimize support to the Navy’s shipbuilding plan.

We understand within the Department—and we are making the case on the Hill—

that we must provide industry with the proper incentives to make the long-term investments we need.

We must improve Navy and industry alignment over the long-term—for the health of both.

That alignment must also include a much greater focus on quality.

We need cost-effective, quality ships, produced in a timely manner.

To maintain our critical presence worldwide, we need ships that are available when needed and that are able to perform with high reliability over lengthy deployments, without requiring extensive maintenance periods.

We must do better, and the future of the Navy is dependant on our ability to meet this challenge.

* * *

In closing, the fleet of the future must respond to a spectrum of challenges such as providing maritime security in the Northern Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Guinea, projecting power 8,000 miles from our shores, and taking advantage of the unique capabilities and leverage provided by embarked Marines.

It is a great time to be in the Navy.

With so many new platforms in development and production, with the increasing attention being paid to maritime security among nations, and with the ever-increasing rise of seaborne global commerce, the need for a more capable Navy is greater than ever.

Today, the Navy is key to our destiny as a world power—just as it was in Theodore Roosevelt’s day.

The surface warfare community—because of the diverse roles and missions it is assigned—understands this profoundly.

Every day at sea and every deployment overseas is a demonstration of the unique value of the Navy in defending our Nation’s interests.

Thank you for all you do, and may God bless America.