



*Vice Admiral Cebrowski commanded Fighter Squadron 41 and Carrier Air Wing 8, both embarked in USS Nimitz (CVN 68). He later commanded the assault ship USS Guam (LPH 9) and, during Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, the aircraft carrier USS Midway (CV 41). Following promotion to flag rank he became Commander, Carrier Group 6 and Commander, USS America Battle Group. In addition to combat deployments to Vietnam and the Persian Gulf, he has deployed in support of United Nations operations in Iraq, Somalia, and Bosnia. He has served with the U.S. Air Force; the staff of Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet; the staff of the Chief of Naval Operations, on four occasions; with the Joint Staff (as J6); and as Director, Navy Space, Information Warfare, and Command and Control (N6). Vice Admiral Cebrowski became the forty-seventh President of the Naval War College in July 1998.*

## PRESIDENT'S FORUM

---

*America's international status and global interests require that our forces have as their operating domain not only the majority of the earth's surface, but also the skies and space above, the ocean depths below, and the electronic environment we think of as cyberspace.*

**T**HE TITLE OF THESE NOTES might well be "Stronghold Lost."

During our March intersessional conference, the importance of geography in the Information Age was debated. The U.S. military has already demonstrated that, as information is substituted for mass, military forces can respond more rapidly and overcome many of the traditional impediments imposed by geography. We further hear that in Information Age war the occupation of terrain may not always be a legitimate objective of military operations. These arguments combine to challenge traditional thinking about the priority of geography—strategically, operationally, and tactically. Care must be taken lest we make judgments which are too broad, resulting in decisions which increase risk.

The concept of a stronghold is closely linked to key elements of geography in both time and space. Strongholds are places of security for friendly forces, areas that the enemy cannot reach and his forces cannot effectively threaten. This concept is deeply imbedded in military thinking. Traditionally, strongholds were situated where geographic features suggested, as at West Point on the Hudson River during the American Revolution or Fort McHenry protecting Baltimore's Inner Harbor in 1814; sometimes, however, they were created as military expedience dictated, as in "circling the wagons" on the American Great Plains. Either way, to be able to fight from a stronghold is a great advantage. To allow an enemy a stronghold is to yield to him some degree of control over the initial conditions of an engagement. Because of the way that a war proceeds, small changes in initial conditions can result in profound changes in outcome. This is why controlling

the initial conditions, holding the initiative, and fighting from strongholds are so important.

More than ten years ago, historian Colin Gray asserted that America has had the wonderful blessing of never having to fight for its survival at the start of a war. To put it bluntly, America has become accustomed to playing “away games.” Bordered by two vast oceans and two friendly neighbors, America has enjoyed the great strategic advantage of being a secure stronghold. With that advantage, America has decided which wars to fight and whether to win or lose them. But now, many argue that even if Gray still is right today, he will not be so for long: the preferred American way of war is increasingly at risk.

The prospect of national vulnerability affects the security policies and decisions of the new administration. It casts a different light on the controversial subject of missile defense and places it in the context of a far larger issue. The loss of the homeland stronghold indicates a requirement for a broad program, of which missile defense is but a part. A global power with global interests quite naturally wants to be able to use all the instruments of national power for policy purposes ranging from homeland defense through the projection of national values. But, in the case of America, the growing vulnerability of our nation itself may restrict, if not exclude, some options at all levels of security planning.

Our national preference (and a moral imperative) is to deliberate at length whether to go to war. Once war is decided upon, this nation traditionally builds a coalition, preferably including nations near the scene of action, and moves forces forward *en masse*. A forward stronghold is created with the acquiescence and assistance of coalition partners in the region. Alternatively, a stronghold can be created at sea. Commanders maneuver their forces to create secure operational zones if only for brief, necessary periods.

Thus, we see the concept of stronghold manifested at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. Americans prefer this approach for the same reason that potential enemies seek to prevent us from using it. In fact, we like the concept of strongholds so much that the nation is willing to go to extraordinary lengths to create and maintain them. I hardly need to remind readers that in World War II we suspended the civil rights of Japanese-Americans because their very presence was thought to be an internal threat to the national stronghold. During the Cold War, we adopted the seemingly perverse strategy of mutually assured destruction in the hope that, with both sides' strongholds vulnerable to devastation, neither side would dare attack at that level.

Today, for example, at the highest governmental level the use of chemical or biological weapons is declared to be unacceptable, and it is a national goal that certain technologies will not be allowed to proliferate. By invoking prohibitions in this way the nation seeks to establish universally acknowledged strongholds.

A strategic example is the decision to dominate the sea, air, space, and cyberspace as operating domains. At the level of grand strategy we speak of the concept of “projecting defense” as a means of coalition creation and assurance. This defensive concept extends to the operational level of war when we employ forward basing, either ashore or afloat. At the tactical level of war, strongholds can be created in locale with maneuver, or in time with speed. The techniques used normally depend on the physics of the systems involved and on the environment. Tactically, the duration of a stronghold may need to be only seconds, or perhaps less.

What are the implications for the Navy? From the perspective of strategy, the Navy must train, equip, and operate to maximize its capabilities in its operating domain. America’s international status and global interests require that our forces have as their operating domain not only the majority of the earth’s surface, but also the skies and space above, the ocean depths below, and the electronic environment we think of as cyberspace. Here, the U.S. Navy must predominate.

At the operational level of war, the Navy must guarantee both speed of deployment and speed of employment of force. Time lost in the creation of a stronghold in effect grants a stronghold to the enemy. This suggests a need for forces which are capable of clearing distant seas of mines and enemy submarines, while projecting air and missile defense and essential elements of the joint force, including sensors and command and control capabilities, all at high speed in the opening days or even hours of a conflict.

The critical planning requirement at the tactical level of war is to offset the emerging condition of tactical instability. Tactical instability occurs when unit or force capability is allowed to increase disproportionately to survivability, which is staying power under stress. What tactical instability produces is a force which has to be risk averse. Such a force is unable to conduct sustained operations in heavily contested areas; by extension, then, it is unable to support other elements of the joint force in such areas. In the case of the U.S. Navy, if highly capable units are too vulnerable to operate in littoral regions, the Navy cannot perform missions itself nor support joint and coalition forces in those regions. The point is not that the Navy must be able to create a permanent geographic stronghold in the close-in littoral for any and every purpose, but that it must be able to fight and sustain forces whenever and wherever that is required. The consequence of tactical instability will be that an enemy will enjoy the advantages of operating from a stronghold, one that contains the vast majority of the world’s population, the sources of much of the world’s wealth, and the termini of the world’s most critical networks.

We—not our enemies—must fight from the strongholds of the future. To do so will require a profound comprehension of tomorrow’s battlespace, from the complexities of urban combat to the intricacies of orbital dynamics, and from

the details of electromagnetic propagation to the subtleties of an adversary's motivations. Will we be able to establish strongholds wherever and whenever the United States may need them? That is the challenge now being posed to tomorrow's leaders.

ARTHUR K. CEBROWSKI  
*Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy*  
*President, Naval War College*