



Selling the Navy Through “The Global Force for Good”

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A few weekends ago, I was watching football on TV when the newest Marine Corps recruiting commercial came on my 55-inch Toshiba. The commercial opens with a smoke-filled horizon in an unknown, desolate land, while the sounds of chaos fill the air. It's not clear what is going on, but danger and uncertainty lurk nearby. Suddenly, a group of Marines in full combat gear appear, running towards the darkened horizon in a full sprint, steely-eyed determination etched on their camouflaged faces. Soon the Marines on the ground are joined by brother Marines, riding in combat vehicles and helicopters; all continue towards the sounds of conflict. A young Marine turns around and vigorously beckons those behind him to follow. The commercial, titled “Toward Chaos,” ends with the tagline “Which way would you run?”¹

Later as I was flipping between channels in search of other football games, the Navy's latest advertisement came on. The commercial builds slowly; at the beginning, an overhead shot of the ocean dominates the screen. Soon various statistics begin to emerge out of the ocean surface – “70% of the world is covered by ocean; 80% of people live near water; 90% of all trade travels by water” – and is followed by the massive bulk of an aircraft carrier, warplanes active on its deck, gliding through the ocean. The tagline “100% on Watch” trails in the wake of the carrier, followed by the current Navy recruiting slogan “America's Navy: A Global Force for Good.”²

After watching the Navy commercial, I couldn't help but concede that my brethren in green had hit another advertising home run. The Marines consistently make great recruiting slogans; “Toward Chaos” is the latest in a long line of successful pitches. It's not that the Navy commercial wasn't good; it is compelling and suspenseful. In fact, all the commercials produced under the “Global Force for Good”

construct make good TV. But the Marine commercial is a visceral attempt to challenge individuals to meet the Marine standard – it sells their warrior ethos to potential recruits. In contrast, the Navy commercials appears to seek justification for building the carrier which just flashed by the screen.

The “Global Force for Good” campaign is not about recruitment per se; it’s about defending the Navy’s existence to an American public distracted by the ground wars in Afghanistan and Iraq over the last decade. The advertising campaign followed the 2007 release of the *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, the landmark U.S. maritime strategy document co-authored by the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. The strategy called for, among other things, enhanced cooperation with international naval forces and humanitarian assistance as a core competency for U.S. naval forces.³ The “Global Force for Good” campaign helps sell the strategy in a time where defense expenditures are expected to shrink. As future budget cuts loom, public promotion of the Navy makes sense; the service requires broad support from those Congressional districts in the U.S. heartland as much they do from the districts on the East and West coast, where the Navy presence is more visible. Moreover, the Navy is right to use the campaign to capitalize on its recent successes with providing humanitarian assistance across the globe, from earthquake relief in Haiti to providing post-tsunami aid to our Japanese allies. And recent polling suggests a high percentage of the American public expects the U.S. military to be capable of conducting these types of operations.⁴

But “Global Force for Good” falls short in how it portrays the ethos of the service, and I believe that’s why the slogan is regularly panned by service members. The Navy, at its core, is a fighting organization charged with the protection of the Nation and the defeat of its enemies; this aspect is even immortalized in the Sailor’s Creed (“I represent the *fighting* spirit of the Navy and those who have gone before me to defend freedom and democracy around the world”).⁵ Yet when one examines recent Navy recruitment campaigns, the martial aspects of the service have been de-emphasized in favor of selling potential applicants on a career. These past recruitment campaigns failed to acknowledge the combat history of the Navy, and the “Global Force for Good” likewise fails to capture the essence of the service.

The Navy has a checkered history with its advertising slogans; I remember “It’s not a job, it’s an adventure” from my father’s days in the Navy during the early 1980’s. During my own time, “Let the Journey Begin” and “Accelerate Your Life” served as the Navy’s recruiting slogans. While catchy, they were was far from motivating -- it was clear that the Navy was selling a job or a career. “Global Force for Good” marks a change from selling a career to promoting a strategy, but it still does not speak to the ethos of the Navy; rather, it is how the Navy believes it will be utilized in the future.

The Marines don’t have this problem. Their current campaign continues a long tradition of producing outstanding recruiting campaigns aligned with their warrior ethos which challenges viewers to meet their expectations. Growing up in the 1980’s, I remember seeing commercials for the “The Few, The Proud, The Marines,” and they have never strayed from that message. They are not merely selling a job or career – they are offering a lifestyle, a membership in an exclusive warrior club. And while their latest campaign nests with the “Global Force for Good” construct – Marine helicopters are seen delivering boxes labeled “US AID” in the newest Marine commercial – the subsequent tagline clearly aims to provoke potential recruits.

The Navy should take a cue from their Marine brothers and re-examine the “Global Force for Good” message. If the intent is to help sell the new naval strategy to the Nation, the door is left open for criticism from those opposed to utilizing the Navy and Marines as global cops on perpetual patrol. While successes like humanitarian assistance and even the elimination of Osama Bin Ladin by Navy SEALs certainly bolster the credibility of the “Global Force for Good” construct, inaction in other crises – such

as the ongoing slaughter in Syria – reduce the slogan to empty words and promises. Instead, the Navy should remember that it is always in competition to attract recruits; having an advertising campaign which reflects the service’s own combat history will help ensure the Navy’s access to a new generation of warfighters. It might even make a good commercial.

¹ United States Marine Corps Video available at <http://www.marines.com/global-impact/toward-chaos>.

² United States Navy Video available via YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEtZ5r0CIYI>.

³ United States Navy, United States Marine Corps, United States Coast Guard, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, 2007.

⁴ The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, *Foreign Policy in the New Millennium: Results of the 2012 Chicago Council Survey of American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 17.

⁵ The full U.S. Navy Sailor’s Creed is available at <http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/creed.htm>.