

PRESIDENT'S FORUM



The Twenty-First International Seapower Symposium

THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE recently hosted, on behalf of the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), one of the most important events conducted on our campus in more than three years. The Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard “Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower” challenged the nation’s maritime services to help “foster and sustain cooperative relationships with more international partners.” A major step toward meeting this challenge took place in September 2014, when the College hosted the Twenty-First International Seapower Symposium (ISS). The theme this year was “Global Solutions to Common Maritime Challenges.”

First held in Newport in 1969, the biennial ISS offers a unique opportunity for the world’s maritime leaders to discuss and promote international maritime security cooperation. These discussions offer opportunities for future voluntary regional and international collaboration in searching for solutions to challenges facing the global network of maritime nations. Through these symposia, the CNO seeks individual inputs and proposals for enhancing regional and global maritime security. ISS is indeed unique, as it is the only forum in the world that brings together the heads of so many navies at the same time to enhance maritime security and collaborative operations. Discussions at ISS have resulted in many successful efforts to enhance cooperation in countering piracy, providing disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, coordinating search and rescue at sea (including submarine rescue), and planning and conducting coalition military operations and joint law enforcement to counter arms, drug, and human trafficking, as well as fishery and pollution violations.

At the 2014 symposium, 217 naval leaders representing 110 countries came together to discuss issues of common concern in the maritime environment. Within this distinguished group were eighty-six Naval War College alumni and thirty-two U.S. Navy flag officers. Among the heads of navy in attendance was Admiral Wu Shengli, the first delegate from the People's Liberation Army Navy to attend ISS.

In plenary sessions, the delegates heard from Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus; Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jonathan Greenert; Pulitzer Prize-winning global energy expert Dr. Daniel Yergin; Hoover Institution Distinguished Visiting Fellow General James Mattis, USMC (Ret.); and nationally recognized climatologist Rear Admiral David Titley, USN (Ret.). To encourage face-to-face discussion of issues with geographical focus, regional breakout groups were formed for the areas of the

- Atlantic Ocean
- Caribbean Sea
- Gulf of Guinea
- Indian Ocean / Gulf of Aden / Arabian Sea / Red Sea
- Norwegian Sea / North Sea / Baltic Sea
- Mediterranean / Black Sea / Caspian Sea
- Pacific Ocean.

In each breakout group, the discussion focused on issues such as

- Future Trends in Maritime Security
- Enhancing Coalition Operations
- Regional Maritime Agreements
- Lessons learned during the search for Malaysian Airlines Flight MH-370.

The discussions held over the three-day symposium helped establish the foundation for a more stable global maritime environment for many years to come.

In his remarks, Secretary Mabus said,

The truth is sailors of all nations have much in common with other sailors. The chief of one of our partner navies in Asia who is here today once offered me his view of the difference between soldiers and sailors. Soldiers, he said, by necessity focus on boundaries and obstacles, man-made or natural. They are constantly looking down at the ground. Sailors, on the other hand, head out to sea and see no boundaries, no obstacles. They look out and they see nothing but the horizon, nothing but possibilities.

The formal ISS XXI proceedings will be published in the spring and will be available on the Naval War College website, www.usnwc.edu/.

The Naval War College is fortunate to have Admiral Guillermo E. Barrera, Colombian Navy (Ret.), on its faculty as a CNO Distinguished International Fellow. He is in the unique position of having attended ISS events at the Naval War College since 2007. His reflections on the value of the ISS series included the following:

During ISS XXI, I felt that the assembled CNOs were much closer to one another than they were at ISS XVIII in 2007, both as human beings and as friends. I think this is one of the reasons why they more fully understand that the challenges at sea are common for many countries, and therefore for their navies. Several of the visiting CNOs used phrases from the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard's "Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower" (which had been announced at ISS XVIII) in their presentations. Many of them subscribed to the notion that "trust cannot be surged." Virtually every speaker referred to the need for enhanced cooperation. The CNO of China's People's Liberation Army Navy publicly supported the concept of cooperation and suggested the universal application of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES),* which was an outgrowth of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium held in Qingdao, China, in 2014. It was great to hear how the afternoon panel on the first day set the example of familiarity and friendship that followed until Friday. Many close friendships were started or strengthened during those three days. One very important aspect is that ISS provides a great framework for a number of bilateral and multilateral meetings that helped the assembled CNOs to grow in cooperation and friendship. Many of these meetings and reunions could never happen outside of ISS. Looking to the future, I believe that there must be a continuous effort to connect this year's event with the next ISS in 2016, in order for ISS to have a truly positive impact on the navies of the world.

I echo Admiral Barrera's thoughts and believe that the ISS series is one of the single most influential factors in increasing maritime trust and cooperation around the globe.

Secretary Mabus very succinctly summarized the mission that all in attendance shared: "All of you here today are sailors and marines; you are focused on the horizon, on possibilities, on future opportunities. All of us in this room face a similar job. We have the task of explaining to our governments and our citizens

* CUES is a nonbinding, voluntary agreement to follow certain set procedures for communicating with other military forces encountered at sea or in the air. It covers what steps should be taken to reduce interference and uncertainty during unexpected contact between naval vessels or aircraft. Communication methods include the firing of different-colored flares and the use of signal flags, as well as using a list of English-language terms.

why our navies matter. We have to make sure they understand how important the maritime world is to our success economically and to our security. We have to encourage them to look outward, across the sea to that far horizon.”

I salute the combined Naval War College / CNO Staff team for the years of planning and organization that ensured success in this important endeavor.

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