

CURRENT STRATEGY FORUM

1978

Opening Remarks

by

VADM J. B. STOCKDALE  
President of the Naval War College

Mr. Secretary, honored guests, I would like to start off this afternoon by introducing one guest and that's the governor of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations The Honorable Joseph Garrahy.

When I had the great privilege of taking over the Presidency of this school about six months ago, it was to me the answer to a prayer because I had always wanted to be a schoolmaster and I'm being just that. I hope to enter the classroom this fall. I particularly like being a schoolmaster when the subjects are so dear to my heart: the Navy, where I spent 35 years of my life and which I consider my home, and a country which I love very much and hope to see survive and prosper.

This is an audience which represents the country. I've studied your distinguished backgrounds. There are some among you whom I have admired from afar. Others which have been dear to me in some of the most important times of my life. Among you are civilian businessmen who once were naval officers with me, either as a postgraduate school student, as a destroyer sailor, or as a fighter pilot. There are active duty officers among you who were with me in some of those exciting days as a

test pilot, and some even more exciting days as a prisoner of war. There are professors among you who were my classroom mentors past and present. I welcome you all. It's the time of the year when we gather together a widely representative group of American citizens--all with different backgrounds, different interests, different professions, different faiths, different disciplines, and certainly different convictions--but Americans all and all concerned about how this Republic fares.

We're here for two days to focus on "The Navy and National Strategy. What Kind of a Future Navy and Why," a very basic issue and one that I hope we can avoid obscuring with programmatic gobbledygook. It's a basic issue because it's about force and because it's about national power. Of course some of you understandably may abhor that subject, but I think it's regrettably true that war is the way of the world. At least the most thorough historians I know--Will and Ariel Durant--claimed to have searched 4000 years of human history to date, and can find only 268 of those 4000 years when war did not blight the planet.

Incidentally, I asked the Durants to come here to speak (not at this but at another occasion). I had met them in San Diego and I can call them in all honesty "a sweet old couple." We met at something called the American Academy of Achievement; our jobs were to discuss on a couple of occasions the affairs of the world and our careers with honor students from across the country. The Durants took the stage, she behind him on a

walker. She had fallen and broken her hip. He's over 90 and deaf. It came time for questions and she would have to repeat each, yelling in his ear. He said, "What?, What was it?" And she said, "Will, they want to know what you think about American foreign policy."

Now, this was some years ago and I don't ever have to specify the administration. He finally understood the question and he said, "Ah, I think we're all mixed up; we seem to be working on the assumption that if we're nice to other people they'll be nice to us. In 4000 years, I can tell you there's absolutely no evidence to support that view."

If you don't like the Durant's view, maybe you would like my predecessor's, Alfred Thayer Mahan. In talking about power, he said a very neat thing, I thought, "The purpose of power is to permit moral ideas to take root." That's one reason why the subject of the week is basic, because it's about something very basic, power.

It's also a basic subject for a second reason, particularly for Americans, because it's about the sea, and we Americans are children of the sea. Now it's true that from platforms like this you are always told on the first day that this is an island nation and that for commercial and other reasons we behave like an island. As Henry Kissinger said a little more eloquently from this platform about two weeks ago, our history (in his view) is broken into three segments vis-à-vis the sea. First we saw the sea as a moat early in our days, then as a haven for our

allies--the British and their navy which protected us. Now it may be described sometimes as a lair for our enemies with their missile submarines. I see us as children of the sea because of America's identity with the historic cosmology of the sea in the Western mind.

Saturday night I spent much too long reading a fascinating book written 20 years ago by a Latin-American scholar by the name of Edmundo Gorman, The Invention of America. It claims that America was not discovered; it was invented. In well foot-noted detail, he talks about the terrible upheavals in scientific and religious thought that Christopher Columbus' cruise reports caused during the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

The reports were disturbing for many reasons. Admiral Columbus didn't help any since he clung to the myth that he had gotten to Asia. He clung to it through four cruises when he knew much better. It was obvious that he knew much better although he could see certain similarities between the topography of the southern coast of Cuba and parts of Southeast Asia. In spite of his reason it became an obsession, a matter of faith. He'd gotten paid for discovering Asia and his reputation ultimately rested upon it.

Incidentally, he was not on the outs with Amerigo Vespucci. His fourth cruise and Amerigo's first were almost simultaneous. Amerigo of course went down around Portugal. They agreed privately that there had to be another continent, and they let the latter announce the truth when it was politic to do so--sort of by mutual consent. Thus the name America.

But let's talk a little more about the scientific and political and religious problems that Columbus stirred up. First of all, mathematicians had problems. The Greeks pretty well knew that the earth was round and they knew pretty much about its size from astronomical observations and various ingenious mathematical functions they had performed. Things weren't working out right: the earth would be half-size if Columbus was right--figuring how fast he went and how long it took him. Then they were working with a terrible mess because nothing would come out right.

Furthermore, science, folklore, and religion had all held correctly that the earth is mostly water. If you will remember, the Book of Genesis talks about God's parting the waters and making earth. The earth was the exception, not the land. It was an earth as conceived by the ancients, an earth of islands, not an earth of lakes. If you believed Columbus, then you had to throw that out. The Old Testament Lord was a strict disciplinarian who combated evil by inflicting pestilence and locusts, famine and drought. Back to the human cosmology there was something mysterious about the sea, because of all those, only in one case did He swear He would never repeat it--that was the flood. Theologians had problems. They had Adam and Eve problems if we suddenly come up with another continent. How did that work out? How did original sin work? They had a well established island of the earth theory.

Even St. Augustine's Celestial City was open only to the residents of the three known continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. So, it was a very delicate problem which had to be worked carefully. It's probably good that we weren't in the age of instant news analysis, or you would have really gotten some people upset. It took 17 years after the first reports from Columbus, until 1507 for the most important document of geographic science to be issued. It was in this book, I'll use it as my English interpretation the Latin title: Introductory Cosmology, put out by the Academie of Saint Dié in the year of 1507. This book accounted for the discovery of a new world. It, of course, said there are really still only three continents, but there's a special place--a fourth place--sometimes called an island and sometimes called a continent. They said that there's another special place in the world, and we'll name it after the man who first rightly identified it, Amerigo Vespucci.

So the new world was not comparable to what today might be seen as maybe a new place to invest money. It was much more important than you can conceive, should we discover some new celestial body. Columbus had a much greater impact on human thought than did the astronauts' going to the moon, because it was the very essence of the way they thought this universe was put together. We had to make an exception for America.

Why all of this intellectual history? Because we live in our minds and reality is what we want to believe. The reality

of the sea in America is that it has driven our history, not only military, but diplomatic and economic, incident after incident. A man told me the other day that in the year 1820 slavery was dead. There was no economic reason for it. In fact, the economy of the country was dead, and the agronomists of the South and the traders of the port of New York had a solution. That solution was cotton. We became the biggest cotton exporters in the world. For two generations, we were involved as a nation largely with the exportation of that cotton. For prosperity, plantations and slavery were necessary; indians had to be run off of their lands in Alabama. The industrial north grew as a result of this. All tied, in this man's view, to that sea force. Our concept of our difference as Americans, of our new world, of our cosmology, of aloofness, all stems from the fact that we are different from that fourth place. This might have something to do with our national defense concepts, with our forward strategy where the ramparts of our defense are at our adversaries' gates and not at ours.

Maybe we naturally assume we own the sea. Can we afford this sort of a defense posture? Should we make ourselves afford it for the protection of our children?

## INTRODUCTION OF THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

It's always a pleasure as a sailor to introduce a sailor's sailor, but our keynote speaker for this Forum is not only that. He's as well a lawyer's lawyer, a businessman's businessman, and an executive's executive. Born in Roanoke, Virginia, he is a graduate of Jefferson's own University of Virginia, and then of Harvard Law. I learned in the car coming over that at Virginia he did not prepare as most lawyers prepare for law school. He majored in math and physics, which tells you something right there. At Harvard Law School, where he won his degree, he was President of the Harvard Law Review. He was later a law clerk for two of America's most distinguished jurists, Learned Hand and Louis Brandeis.

He fought in World War II with a record that would put many professionals to shame. He was a shipboard combat officer in the Atlantic, in the Mediterranean, and in the Pacific, the commanding officer of three ships--two of them destroyers. With what I, in the best intentioned way say is typical of our U.S. Naval Reserve Officers and their audacious practicality, he almost single-handedly was the rescuer of the crew of the torpedoed cruiser Indianapolis.

For the last 30 years--more than 30--he has been a lawyer, businessman and then chief executive officer and Chairman of the Board of Southern Railways, a company that Dunn's Review named as one of the five best managed companies in the United States. A man who brings to our Navy Secretariat a unique and



broad experience. He is the first Secretary ever to have ever commanded a commissioned ship in the Navy. Equally important, he has a combination of moral courage and independence that apparently makes him beholden to no one--only to his conscience and what he believes to be the best for his country. He is our host for this Forum The Honorable W. Graham Claytor, Secretary of the Navy.