Maritime Security, Terrorism, and the “New Economy”

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No economy—“new” or otherwise—can flourish in an insecure or unstable strategic environment. “Security,” as Joseph Nye has said, “is like oxygen—you tend not to notice it until you begin to lose it, but once that occurs there is nothing else that you will think about.”1 Today, the structure and values of human society and the delicately balanced ecosystem upon which they depend for survival are experiencing unprecedented change. The magnitude and tempo of that change, combined with growing interdependence among growing populations, suggest that every citizen of the “global village” has a vital interest in contemporary security strategies. Security is certainly an issue of immediate and pressing importance to those with a stake in the peaceful use of the global ocean.

In changing times it is prudent to revisit the established doctrine, dogma, and assumptions. In the case of contemporary maritime security there are four questions that warrant asking. First, which factors are truly new, and which are either evolving or immutable? Second, what does the concept of “security” really mean? Third, what are the implications of the answers to the preceding questions for the global maritime community? Finally, what conclusions can be drawn upon as guides for future policy and practice?

WHAT’S NEW?

Newness and change are prominent motifs throughout much contemporary analysis of strategic issues. Concepts in civilian society such as the “New

*EDITORS’ NOTE.—This article is based on a keynote presentation to the Panel on Security at the 2002 International Ocean Institute’s Pacem in Maribus Conference on The Ocean in the New Economy, Cape Town, South Africa, December 2002. It was originally titled “New Wine in Old Wineskins?: The Global Ocean and Contemporary Security Strategies.”

Economy” are paralleled within the military community by ideas such as the “Revolution in Military Affairs.” But what do these ideas really mean? Do they actually take us into new and uncharted waters, or are they simply new variations on old themes? Either way, what do we need to do about them?

The “New Economy”?

The phenomenon described by the phrase “New Economy” is indeed new. According to one definition, it “describes aspects or sectors of an economy that are producing or intensely using innovative or new technologies. This relatively new concept applies particularly to industries where people depend more and more on computers, telecommunications and the Internet to produce, sell and distribute goods and services.” If this definition is accepted, then the fundamental nature of maritime trade and ocean resource exploitation remains firmly rooted in the old economy. As Sam Tangredi has said:

In the early 21st century, we live in an era in which information can travel instantaneously on the Internet. Small packages can be flown overnight to cities on the other side of the globe. Human reach extends into space. Yet, often forgotten is the fact that 90 percent of international trade still travels by sea, for the very same physical reasons that it did in 1902. The sea remains the most efficient and cheapest means of transporting bulk materials. There appears to be no impending technological breakthrough to change this situation in the near future.

Nonetheless, the use of innovative new technologies and concepts do affect the way that maritime commerce is conducted. Geographically distributed production, the trend toward hub and spoke ports, practices such as just-in-time delivery, and the high degree of dependence on computers and satellites, all create significant vulnerabilities that demand robust security if they are to work. Consequently, the New Economy does have significant security implications for ocean governance and economic security.

Revolution in Military Affairs?

The military analogue to the civilian “New Economy” is the “Revolution in Military Affairs” (RMA), which has been defined as “the quantum leap in