

CNO: Secure Maritime System Imperative for Global Way of Life



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday (right center) and Linda Gilday (left center) speak with international delegates during the International Seapower Symposium welcome reception at Rosecliff Mansion in Newport, Rhode Island. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Sean Castellano*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Many of the Mahanian principles of sea power are as applicable today as ever, the U.S. Navy's top officer said, noting that navies and coast guards are the guarantors of the world's commerce and hence the well-being of nations.

"Providing a safe, secure, and stable maritime system is an imperative to all of mankind ... and it is an essential part of what our navies do every day," said Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Mike Gilday. "We are not simply the "keeper of the seas" ... but the 'keeper of the global way of life' as well."

Gilday was addressing a gathering of naval leaders from around the world during the Sept. 15 opening day of the 24th International Seapower Symposium, an event normally held every two years at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. The event was attended in person or over the internet by 135 delegates from 104 nations. Last year's planned symposium was cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Like all of you ... I believe that robust, resilient, and responsible sea power is an international consortium of like-minded nations," Gilday said. "We are the primary guarantors of peace, prosperity, and the open flow of goods along the oceans.

Our navies provide these benefits to the citizens we serve every day ... in peacetime and especially during these times of

competition ... not just in rare moments of conflict.”

The CNO pointed out that the ideas of Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan bring to mind decisive battles at sea, sea control, and combat credibility.

“I think many of those arguments are still relevant today,” Gilday said. “But over time ... Mahan refined the rationale for sea power. Naval combat power became less pronounced, and economics took a more central role. Mahan believed that one of the fundamental applications of naval power was to protect an increasingly globalized world economy. You see, wealth generation comes from commerce ... and commerce ... floats on seawater. ... Our economies, our values, and our cultures are more attached to the sea than any point in history.”

The CNO noted several facts that illustrate the magnitude of the maritime economy today. The world’s trading fleet today includes more than 60,000 ships. New container ships nearly 400 meters long can carry more than 20,000 containers. There are more than 160 offshore wind farms providing electrical power to millions of homes and businesses. There are 20,000 desalinization plants that provide fresh water to hundreds of millions of people. Ships are engaged in deep-sea mining to extract critical minerals. He also noted the importance of underwater cables that transnational communications traffic.

In a press conference following the speech, Gilday said “the seas are getting more contested and more congested,” and that “almost 100% of our internet connectivity is connected through trans-oceanic cables.”

Gilday championed the international rules-based order that “preserves the maritime commons for freedom and fairness ... for coexistence and for harmony ... where the collective goals of all people – regardless of where they call home – can be

advanced.

“Since it is in the political, social, and economic interests of all of us to ensure the freedom of the seas ... this is a responsibility with truly global consequences, not just for today, but for our children and their children,” he said. “It cannot be taken for granted ... peace does not happen by accident. When the rules prevail, everyone prospers. When the rules are undermined ... or worse, broken altogether ... the world is a less secure and poorer place for all of us.”

The CNO stressed the importance of the navy-to-navy and coast guard-to-coast guard relationships that “serve as a strong and stable keel for the broader international community. This keel serves as a shock absorber ... and in turn ... provides the underlying structure for global stability.

“Every day ... our Sailors send a “bow wave” of diplomacy in front of their path ... assuring our allies, partners, and friends ... and deterring malign behavior that threatens the international order that is so important,” he said.