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# Maritime Strategy in a New Era of Great Power Competition

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## **Introduction**

**A**s a maritime nation, naval power is the U.S.'s most useful means of responding to distant crises, preventing them from harming our security or that of our allies and partners, and keeping geographically remote threats from metastasizing into conflicts that could approach our borders. A maritime defense demands a maritime strategy. As national resources are increasingly strained the need exists for a strategy that makes deliberate choices to connect ends (security) with means (money and the fleet it builds). This paper examines the need for a maritime strategy, discusses options, and offers recommendations for policy makers.

After several decades of unchallenged world leadership, the United States once again faces great power competition, this time featuring two other world powers. China and Russia increasingly bristle under the constraints of the post-World War II systems of global trade, finance, and governance largely created by the United States and its allies, systems that the United States has protected and sustained to the economic and security benefit of its citizens and the citizens of other nations. Both China and Russia are demonstrably improving the quality of their armed forces while simultaneously acting aggressively toward neighboring countries, some of which are US treaty allies. Additionally, both nations are turning their attention to naval operations far from their own coasts, operations designed to advance national interests that are often in tension with those of the United States.<sup>1</sup>

For the past several decades, US national security strategy has not had to contend with great powers. Instead, it has concerned itself primarily with building alliances designed to manage regional security more efficiently by proxy, while devoting increasingly more resources to homeland defense and intelligence aimed at stemming acts of terror by Islamic radical organizations and their followers. To the extent that the US position of leadership in the world was not threatened, this strategy was reasonable, if imperfectly pursued.

Such a strategy will no longer suffice in a world of great power competition, especially one in which powers of considerable—but unequal—strength are opposed. Unbalanced multi-polarity is an especially unstable condition, and the United States is not effectively postured to manage that instability. Henry Kissinger divides the concept of world order into two parts: a normative system that defines acceptable action, and a 'balance of power' arrangement that punishes the breach of such conventions<sup>2</sup>. As the underlying balance of forces shifts, states with different ideas of international order gain the power to reshape the system. Thucydides' ancient insight holds true – the rise in power of one actor threatens all others. Where such threat exists and if the balance of power between states or coalitions approaches equilibrium, a "Cold War" between competing ideological camps occurs.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Jacobs and Jane Perlez, "U.S. Wary of Its New Neighbor in Djibouti: A Chinese Naval Base," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2017, accessed October 17, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/world/africa/us-djibouti-chinese-naval-base.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015), 9.

In an unbalanced system, the stronger side is tempted to strike its weaker opponent while the balance of forces is favorable. Unbridled competition for supremacy defined Europe during its bloodiest periods. Europe's 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century religious wars between Catholics and Protestants and the global 20<sup>th</sup> century struggles between totalitarian ideologies and democracy both represent the natural end-state of unbalanced multipolar systems. Without norms to restrain states and force to uphold these norms, violence is very likely.

Today's international system is moving toward unbalanced multi-polarity. Unfortunately, the United States is not currently prepared to manage such an international environment. If Americans want to preserve their nation's secure and prosperous position as the world's great power, the United States must begin now to prepare strategically for what it will inevitably face. Otherwise, it will ultimately be forced into an increasingly limited number of unattractive options to sustain its position of leadership.

There is little evidence that the people of the United States wish to see our position in the world diminished. The 2016 Presidential Election raised important questions about the degree to which globalization has served the interests of everyday Americans (and their perceptions thereof), while the two dominant US political parties have moved toward more protectionist policies, at least as articulated by their nominees. Opinion polling indicates the divided nature of the American public on issues like free trade and sustained foreign commitments.<sup>3</sup> However, Americans remain cognizant of threats to the United States, and favor maintaining America's position as a great power by sustaining a strong military.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it would be difficult to identify meaningful numbers of Americans who would sacrifice national security in favor of increased social spending, despite the continuing rise in non-discretionary spending in the federal budget. Americans understand that the US position of world leadership benefits the nation's economy, its security, its allies, and the international order that has been the object of US foreign and defense policy for over a century. They know that their lives would be diminished if this position of global leadership were surrendered to an adversary or group of them. The paradox of the American experience is that the US is not simply a great power – it is an exceptional power, for which ideals count as much as strength. The American public, despite its aversion to foreign commitments, can rise to the occasion and respond to clear threats, as it has in both World Wars, the Cold War, and after September 11<sup>th</sup>. The job of the policymaker, therefore, is to ensure America remains a great power, so that when the occasion arises, it can act as an exceptional power.

It is critical then, for US political leaders to begin thinking more strategically about protecting and advancing America's position in the face of growing great power competition. This monograph asserts that a strategy to support such a goal would

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Drake and Carroll Doherty, "Key findings on how Americans view the U.S. role in the world," Pew Research Center, May 05, 2016, accessed October 17, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/05/05/key-findings-on-how-americans-view-the-u-s-role-in-the-world/>.

<sup>4</sup>"Military and National Defense." Gallup.com. Accessed October 17, 2017. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1666/military-national-defense.aspx>.

necessarily be maritime in nature, leveraging this nation's great geographical advantages in the service of its national power.

Sharing land borders with only two nations—both of whom are friendly to the United States—and separated from other great powers by vast oceans, the United States enjoys a security position quite unlike that of any other nation. For over a century, it has been the unspoken (but doggedly pursued) national security aim of the United States to ensure that no power rise to prominence in Asia or Europe so as to occupy a position there as dominant as the United States' position in the Western Hemisphere. Were this to occur, not only could that nation then lock the United States out of the resources and activity of that region, but it could also then eventually turn its attention to challenging our position in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>5</sup>

Underlying this approach is the reality that most the world's activity does not occur in our own hemisphere, but in Asia and Europe. American interests in these regions—political, diplomatic, economic, and military—are considerable and growing. Protecting and sustaining those interests must remain a priority of American policy, and maritime strategy is an effective tool in doing so.

Maritime strategy is a subset of grand strategy, and the relationship between the two is ably defined by Professor John B. Hattendorf of the Naval War College:

“In its broadest sense, grand strategy is the comprehensive direction of power to achieve particular national goals. Within those terms, maritime strategy is the direction of all aspects of national power that relate to a nation's interests at sea. The navy serves this purpose, but maritime strategy is not purely a naval preserve. Maritime strategy involves the other functions of state power that include diplomacy; the safety and defence of merchant trade at sea; fishing; the exploitation, conservation, regulation and defence of the exclusive economic zone at sea; coastal defence; security of national borders; the protection of offshore islands; as well as participation in regional and world-wide concerns relating to the use of oceans, the skies over the oceans and the land under the seas.<sup>6</sup>

It is wholly appropriate for the world's dominant naval power—separated from its widely-flung interests by thousands of miles of open ocean—to develop and execute coherent maritime strategy. In a time of re-emerging great power competition, it is essential. The nation's current maritime strategy<sup>7</sup> is, unfortunately, not up to the task. It focuses insufficiently on great power competition; it does not recognize the rise in importance of conventional forces in deterring great power war; it does not provide a theory of conventional deterrence appropriate to great powers and their likely objectives;

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<sup>5</sup> H. J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (1904): 436.

<sup>6</sup> John B. Hattendorf, "What is a Maritime Strategy?" *Soundings* 1 (October 2013): 7.

<sup>7</sup> "LT Stephanie Young, "Forward, Engaged and Ready: A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower," All Hands, March 18, 2015, accessed October 17, 2017, <http://allhands.coastguard.dodlive.mil/2015/03/18/forward-engaged-and-ready-a-cooperative-strategy-for-21st-century-seapower/>.

it does not suggest a posture for naval forces that acts as an effective deterrent; its derived force structure is too small and short on effective logistic support; it does not place sufficient value on naval partnerships with geographically important nations which may not be traditional partners; and it is silent on the need for the nation to invest in a maritime industrial base that can enable an appropriate strategy.

This monograph urges new thinking about maritime strategy, a strategy compatible with the United States' responsibilities as the leader of the free world, as well as the world's premier political, military, economic, and diplomatic power. Such a strategy would seek to protect and sustain those leadership positions in the face of renewed great power competition, competition that largely subsumes other, lesser security concerns. There will be those who view this approach as a return to "Cold War" strategic thinking, and we do not shy from this comparison. The United States acted for decades as a coherent strategic actor when faced with expansionist Soviet totalitarianism, and it must act with equal coherence and resolve to contest China and Russia's brands of aggressive mercantilism, regional expansion, and contempt for established global order.

There will be those who evaluate our suggestions in this paper and conclude that the nation cannot afford it, that the expense associated with moving to a maritime grand strategy would imbalance the traditional "ends, ways, means" approach to the making of strategy. And while the ends, ways, means approach is generally relevant to military and operational strategy, it is unsuited to the making of grand strategy for one very important reason. Unlike subordinate levels of strategy, grand strategy re-allocates, re-aligns, and re-orient a nation's "means" to serve strategic "ends". Military strategy starts with the proposition that there is a certain resource level available to pursue its ends. Grand strategy starts with the sum of the nation's output capacity, and then determines how it can most effectively be allocated to the achievement of strategic goals.

Short of war itself, there is nothing in American history that causes strategic re-alignment more reliably than a change in Administration, and we wish to be part of that dialogue. We argue here for a new theory of deterrence, one that revises the Cold War approach in which the Soviet Union was deterred from large-scale conventional attack by the threat of nuclear escalation. Under that rubric, one could justifiably say that America's conventional deterrent was dependent on its strategic deterrent. Today, the decapitating "bolt from the blue" strike is even more remote than it was in the Cold War, and to the extent that nuclear exchange between great powers is conceivable, it is far more likely to flow from conventional conflict that has gone awry. Therefore, to deter nuclear war, we must deter conventional war. No aspect of American military power will be more critical to deterring either nuclear or conventional super-power war than seapower.

American military power must be postured around the world in a more lethal stance, in which forces assigned can delay and deny China or Russia the fruits of limited aggression while raising the cost of trying, rather than (as today) offer some resistance before heavier forces are flowed from garrison or US seaports to reverse gains already made. These forces must be tailored to the regions in which they operate, reflecting sufficient capacity and the specific capabilities necessary to delay or deny the most likely objectives

of aggression. The power-projection priority of US naval forces in the post-Cold War world must expand to a more balanced approach in which sea control is equally prioritized, following decades of relative inattention; and the requisite force structure must be planned and acquired to reflect this equality. While American military power can and will work to shape the operational environment, that shaping would be in support of the overall deterrence posture arrayed against China and Russia, and all peacetime pursuits would be subordinated.

A coherent maritime grand strategy would recognize the immense costs of preparing for great power competition, costs that must be consistently borne across decades to achieve the level of strength required to meet the challenge of deterring two major powers. The United States must re-order portions of the economy to achieve grand strategic ends, to include the promotion of industrial trades necessary to serve the maritime industrial base and other diminishing sectors of the defense industrial base. Political leadership must reinforce the symbiotic relationship between military strength and economic strength, and the multiple benefits to the nation of a sustained military build-up should be marshalled, articulated, and emphasized to build public support. The United States derives great benefit from the dollar's use as the world's reserve currency, a benefit sustained by the perception of the strength and stability of our government and our influence worldwide. Consumers and manufacturers in the US also benefit from the availability of affordable goods and raw materials that arrive in our ports across free seas guaranteed by our naval power.

A maritime grand strategy must include a re-assessment of our alliances and relationships, to include identifying and fostering those with significant geo-strategic impact, some of which are not currently considered to be militarily important. World trade routes, sea lanes, and maritime choke points all should have defining roles in our diplomacy and international relations.

The United States is a wealthy country, and the resources necessary to implement an effective maritime strategy are well within our reach. However, attaining and maintaining sufficient strength to support US great power goals requires political will, and that will must be matched with determined leadership that can articulate the benefits of action and the costs of inaction. History provides a useful example of a great maritime power that allowed short term fiscal policy to set it on a path to decline.

### ***Historical Precedent***

**F**ollowing Nelson's victory over the combined Franco-Spanish fleet at Trafalgar in 1805, the Royal Navy was the most powerful fighting force to have ever sailed the seas, while also maintaining an immense multiyear blockade of the Western European coastline. In battle, Nelson combined aggressive tactics with impeccable seamanship and gunnery to devastating effect. Despite being outnumbered, the Royal Navy destroyed or captured nearly the entire Franco-Spanish fleet, eliminating Napoleon's potential challenge to Britain at sea, and thereby placing the self-crowned French emperor in a situation where he could not project seapower, much less retain access to the seas around the lands he had captured. After Trafalgar, it was difficult to foresee a French victory.

British naval power remained preeminent throughout the rest of the 19th century. The Royal Navy exercised its role as guardian of the seas to further strategic, economic, and humanitarian ends. The UK nearly singlehandedly eliminated the European slave trade, while "showing the flag" in stations around the world, protecting British commerce, and projecting power in various imperial ventures.

The Boer Wars marked the last instance in which Britain enjoyed uncontested sea control. In that conflict, the Royal Navy facilitated a 250,000-man buildup in South Africa from October 1899 to spring 1900.<sup>8</sup> Despite growing international opposition to the conflict, Britain had no difficulty reinforcing its position, ultimately committing 347,000 regulars and over 100,000 colonial soldiers to the theater. Scarcely a decade after this clear display of dominance, the Royal Navy would face its greatest test in the past century.

Britain's naval policy choices from 1895 to 1905 offer a lesson in the dangers of allowing budgets to dictate force structure, subsuming strategy to finance. British aversion to debt financing played a major role in unintentionally directing the UK's naval policy, forcing it to form alliances of enduring significance, rather than temporary convenience: at differing levels of protocol, Britain established security relationships with France, an entente with Russia, an alliance with Japan, and a tacit relationship with the US

After Trafalgar, Britain strove to retain and protect its command of the seas, guard its far-flung imperial possessions, deny rivals access to the benefits of a global commercial system, and restrict adversaries' wartime freedom of maneuver. It achieved this by controlling international chokepoints in the Mediterranean, Pacific, and North Sea while maintaining enough ships at its far-flung international stations to combat any threat. No power or combination of powers could truly challenge British naval dominance until the late 19th century. Unfortunately, shifting international circumstances undermined this approach to achieving global command of the seas.

The two-power standard relied upon the assumption that Britain's challengers would only emerge from the European continent. Britain's location allowed it to keep its fleet unified and still control the North Sea and Western Atlantic. France, on the other hand,

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<sup>8</sup> Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought* (New York, NY: Random House, 1991), 274.

had to divide its fleet between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, while Russia was trapped by the Jutland Peninsula and Turkish Straits. Control of the seas around Europe, therefore, would enable global sea control and preserve the Empire. However, beginning in the 1890s, a growing international naval arms race undermined this two-power standard by producing additional continental and peripheral challengers.

Between 1895 and 1905, a renewed international interest in naval expansion produced a series of challengers to British maritime power. A combination of factors led to this interest. Britain's imperial successes, along with the "Scramble for Africa," demonstrated the link between naval capabilities, colonial possessions, and international power. Alfred Thayer Mahan's theory of seapower was also extremely influential, particularly in Britain, the US, and Germany. Britain arguably became a victim of its own success: The Empire's splendor encouraged others to emulate its methods, triggering a period of international competition. Nationalism amplified the statesman's motivation to achieve national greatness, while mercantilism and expanding industrial interests also played a role in encouraging naval expansion to facilitate imperialism.

Regardless of its multiple causes, international naval expansion from the 1890s onward is a fact. This expansion challenged British power in the "core" – the waters surrounding continental Europe – as well as in the peripheral regions of the Western Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific. Aside from facing its old French enemy, Britain had to be wary of Russian naval expansion, particularly Imperial Russia's interests in Central Asia and the Mediterranean. Germany and Italy were also potential threats – the newly-created German Empire held the balance between French, Russian, and British forces at sea. Additionally, American and Japanese naval expansion now had to be considered. The US Navy, especially after its victory over Spain in 1898, demonstrated itself to be a formidable opponent to the traditional continental powers. Britain ruled Canada and held interests in the Caribbean, but a powerful American fleet with control of a canal across the Isthmus of Panama would be a clear threat to British power in the New World.

The Japanese Navy had also proven itself formidable, even before its confrontation with Russia, during its war with China in 1895. However, strategic issues made war less likely. Japanese expansion had been mainly westward, towards Mainland China, rather than southward toward British possessions in India and the Pacific. Additionally, Japan's tension with Russia made it a potential British partner rather than a likely adversary. The net result of these developments was a clear pattern of international naval construction from around 1895 onward. See chart on the next page:

*Total Global Number of Battleships*<sup>a</sup>

Year	GB	F	R	G	US	J	I
1896	45/12	29/6	10/8	21/3	5/7	0	13/12
1898	51/12	27/9	12/6	17/5	5/8	3/3	15/2
1899	53/17	31/4	12/12	18/7	5/11	3/4	15/4
1901	50/16	28/5	15/10	19/10	7/11	6/1	15/6
1902	52/13	28/8	18/8	25/9	10/8	7/0	17/7
1903	48/15	28/8	18/8	28/8	11/14	7/0	17/6
1904	55/12	30/6	21/9	30/8	12/13	7/2	16/6
1905	59/9	30/6	19/8	29/8	13/13	6/2	16/4
1906	61/6	29/12	12/4	31/8	15/13	11/6	14/4

*Source:* The Admiralty's "Comparative Tabular Statement of the Numerical Strength of the Fleets of Great Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Italy, United States of America, and Japan," issued periodically before 1900 and each year thereafter and published in *Accounts and Papers* in parliamentary records.

<sup>a</sup>Figure before the slant represents the number of battleships of all classes in service in a given year; figure after slant indicates the number of such vessels under construction.<sup>9</sup>

America's 15 battleships in 1906 (15 active, 13 under construction; as compared to five active, seven under construction in 1896), combined with the continental fleets to challenge British power as it was distributed at the time. Britain's contemporary policy was therefore unsustainable. Its naval squadrons, dispersed piecemeal throughout its stations in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, could not adequately respond to a combined enemy fleet in force in either the core or the periphery.

It is necessary to look at Britain's financial situation at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to understand its strategic predicament. During the earlier decades of the century, Britain had been able to fund increasing expenditures on public services and the military by relying on the increasing British population, along with international free trade, to increase revenues faster than expenditures. Britain could rely upon a consistent revenue surplus to fund its activities and used a portion of each year's revenue to create a "sinking fund," designed to act as an emergency reserve and capital pool for debt repayments. By the 1890s, Britain's financial situation showed signs of deterioration. Expenditures had increased to £100 million, and showed no sign of declining.<sup>10</sup> Britain's

<sup>9</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the experience of relative decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 274.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

increasing population and growing expectations were becoming a drain on finances – more citizens necessitated more spending on education, and a heavier burden on public welfare programs. Different interest groups were pressuring the government for financial protection. Farmers required subsidies or price controls, teachers clamored for pension payments, and the elderly poor demanded public assistance. Additionally, Imperial expansion and maintenance took up a growing share of the budget, particularly considering the changing strategic circumstances that Britain had begun to encounter.

Without international upheaval, Britain may have been able to slowly increase taxes and maintain a balanced budget. However, the Boer War placed severe stress on Britain's financial status. Army expenditures reached £44.1 million by the end of the conflict in 1902, while overall government spending broke £200 million.<sup>11</sup> An increase in taxes and emergency capital from the sinking fund stabilized Britain's finances in the short-term, but the Boer War brought the growing crisis in British finance into acute focus. The old model of hoarding revenues during peacetime to be deployed during crisis was no longer viable in the pre-Keynesian world of disciplined national spending.

Britain had two broad financial choices entering the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On one hand, it could maintain and increase spending funded by an increase in taxes or the elimination of the sinking fund, and subsequently rely on debt financing. On the other hand, it could cut spending, attempt to rebalance the budget, and preserve the traditional method of expenditures that avoided debt financing at all cost.

Britain was therefore faced with a major strategic choice. First, it could increase its naval budgets, expand its fleet, scrap the two-power standard, and strive for supremacy over all potential challengers. This would allow the UK to persist in its policy of “splendid isolation,” forgoing permanent international commitments in place of temporary alliances. However, this strategy would come at a cost – a major increase in naval spending that would likely be debt-financed, a move the British government had historically abhorred in all contexts. Second, Britain could modestly expand its naval budgets, surrender regional supremacy in Asia and the Western Atlantic to Japan and the US, and focus on maintaining control of the waters surrounding continental Europe. However, such a strategy came with major risks. It would rely on diplomatic goodwill and an enduring strategic alignment between Britain, Japan, and the United States.

Rather than engaging in serious debate over the strategic risks and benefits of each policy, Britain's leaders allowed financial decisions to dictate their actions—something akin to American policymakers' actions during passage of the Budget Control Act of 2011 and the resulting policy of sequestration. The post-Boer War situation of high income taxes and corn taxes stifled the British economy, prevented any further increase in taxation, and gave ammunition to free trade's opponents.<sup>12</sup> Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Ritchie, who assumed the post in 1902, was a central figure in instigating this process of spending cuts.<sup>13</sup> Ritchie successfully cut taxes and repealed the corn taxes, thereby depriving the government of revenue and forcing spending cuts. The military

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

presented the easier target for spending cuts. Imperial military commanders recognized that the Royal Navy and British Army could not defend Canada, India, and South Africa and maintain control of European waters simultaneously without major spending increases. The Boer War had also exacerbated tensions between Britain and its self-ruling dominions that had largely escaped any financial burden during the conflict.<sup>14</sup> By cutting armaments and inducing the dominions to provide for a greater share of the Empire's defense, British policymakers believed that they could balance the budget while preserving a reasonable margin of safety in Europe. Chancellor of the Exchequer Austen Chamberlain's comment to Lord Selborne, First Lord of the Admiralty, is telling. In September 1903, Selborne wrote to Chamberlain, arguing that Britain "[was faced with] ...two apparently incompatible ideals...To reduce taxation. To maintain the Navy [within] the minimum margin of safety."<sup>15</sup> Chamberlain's response was diplomatic but unmistakable. He tacitly threatened Selborne, implying that if the Navy would not propose cuts, the government would slash the service's budget independently. Cuts began in 1904. The Army's budget was slashed from £94.2 million at the end of the Boer War to £39.6 million in 1903-1904. The navy was expected to follow suit, but the Admiralty vehemently protested spending cuts, and challenged the small 1904 increase of £2 million in naval spending by requesting two more battleships. However, by 1905 the battle had ended. Under First Sea Lord Jacky Fisher's "scheme," naval spending dropped from £41 million to £37.2 million, and continued to decline thereafter.<sup>16</sup>

Fisher's "scheme" may have been the correct strategic choice considering political and financial circumstances. It combined aggressive modernization efforts with a complete reorganization of the fleet's deployment scheme to focus a smaller, more powerful Royal Navy on the North Sea to respond to the growing threat Imperial Germany posed. At its completion, Britain possessed a navy that would carry it through both world wars. However, from 1895 onward, Britain clearly allowed its fiscal outlook, rather than its strategic situation, to dictate its security policy. Aversion to deficit spending, rather than an analysis of the balance of forces, drove Britain's naval policy. Without a debate over strategy, Britain surrendered sea control of the Western Atlantic and Pacific to the United States and Japan respectively. This left its colonial possessions relatively unprotected and required Britain to engage in a permanent alliance system that decreased its diplomatic flexibility, ultimately leading to the destruction of its empire. While Britain had historically aligned with European powers against a continental hegemon, it had previously done so while retaining independent global seapower. Additionally, Britain had been averse to continental engagements since the mid-1820s. A decline in British military strength, precipitated by the budgetary choices of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, forced Britain to abandon this policy and directly engage with the European continent. Britain was forced into an alliance against Germany regardless of its choices.

Although Fisher's mistrust of Germany later proved correct, it took years for Britain to recognize the threat the new *Kaiser Reich* posed. The most powerful nation on the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>15</sup> Selborne Papers quoted in Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 121.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 128.

European continent, Imperial Germany was initially viewed as a potential ally. Ties between Germany and Britain—the royal families of the two states had been closely related since George I of the German House of Hanover became the English king in 1714—manifested themselves in a deep cultural affinity between the two nations. Royal Navy officers frequently trained their Imperial counterparts – the first ship in the Imperial Navy was a British-built cruiser. Nevertheless, Germany’s ambition to dictate world affairs manifested itself in expanding naval power. Germany’s rising naval power was a mortal threat to Britain, regardless of cultural affinity and historical ties. With a first-rate army and navy, Imperial Germany, already dominant on the continent, had the potential to become a true hegemon and create a European Empire centered on Berlin. To counter it, three traditional rivals, France, the UK, and Imperial Russia-created a tacit alliance against this German threat.

Germany’s Navy became the second most powerful in the world. Although smaller than the Royal Navy, Imperial Germany was the only other nation to field dreadnought battleships and battlecruisers in large numbers, directly threatening British power. Britain responded by increasing its own naval construction program, allowing it to maintain a significant margin of superiority over Germany throughout the Great War. However, with a few small changes at the battles of the Helgoland Bight and Dogger Bank, or without Admiral John Jellicoe’s unassailable grasp of British grand strategy, the Battle of Jutland could have been disastrous for the Royal Navy. Britain survived this challenge to its naval superiority, but only just.

The Royal Navy continued its decline during the interwar period, largely due to the ill-conceived Washington and London Naval Treaties. Intended to limit the spread of armaments that conventional wisdom believed had caused the Great War, the treaties only weakened the UK, France, and the US while Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan proceeded to build up their military forces in secret. Emergency readiness programs in the UK, largely put in place by veteran statesman Winston Churchill, improved Britain’s position before the war. Nevertheless, the Royal Navy had to rely on American resources and, later, a naval alliance with the US, to counter the U-boat threat and protect British supply lines. Once Japan entered the war, the UK conceded operational control in the Pacific to the US; the UK did not have the ships or men to participate effectively in the Pacific theater. Without Churchill’s strategic vision, or the personal relationship between Churchill and President Roosevelt, the Royal Navy would have been severely disadvantaged.

Although the Royal Navy was still one of the world’s largest in 1945, it became clear that it would play a secondary role in the broader Western security structure by the time the Cold War began in earnest. The Royal Navy withdrew its forces from east of Suez and retired its fleet carriers by the late 1960s, opting to field light carriers instead. Britain’s independent nuclear deterrent, combined with Lord Mountbatten’s success in developing the Royal Navy’s submarines, gave the UK a place in NATO’s maritime strategy. While important, this role was a shadow of the Royal Navy’s role before World War II.

The Royal Navy’s decline throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century matched the British Empire’s downward trajectory. Britain’s seapower had eventually enabled it to establish a global

norm of free trade while extending its own imperial aspirations. Churchill was correct in believing that America would use its navy to ensure international access to the maritime commons. However, the Royal Navy's decline allowed America to revise the norms Britain had established, particularly on Imperialism. A host of factors, many economic and cultural, prompted the decolonization process, but one cannot discount the role of American pressure on Britain in facilitating the independence of its various colonies. American seapower was most visibly on display during the Suez Crisis. A diplomatic rupture between the US and UK would have been disastrous for Britain precisely because America now controlled the means of international trade, Britain's naval presence in the Mediterranean and Pacific notwithstanding. Britain therefore had no choice but to submit to American pressure. One can only speculate what norms the *Kaiser* would have dictated to Britain if the *Hochseeflotte* had crushed the Grand Fleet. Hitler's immorality and Stalin's ruthlessness offer greater clues about their ideas of international norms. Britain was fortunate to cede its power to a rising America, rather than to one of its other historical challengers.

The modern Royal Navy has continued to decline, downsizing to only 19 surface combatants, no aircraft carriers (although the first of two planned is currently preparing to enter the fleet), and the lowest manpower levels in the past two centuries. Fortunately, the British Empire could rely on the United States to maintain the same international system that it had established. Unfortunately, the United States cannot rely on a similar friendly rising power to maintain the international system it has supported with diplomacy and arms.

### ***American Situation***

**B**ipartisan mud-slinging has always been characteristic of the American political system. In 1824, populist Andrew Jackson called John Quincy Adams' presidential victory a "corrupt bargain" that subverted democratic processes. Theodore Roosevelt castigated William Howard Taft as weak and feeble throughout the election of 1912. During the wartime 1944 presidential election, Thomas E. Dewey tacitly accused Franklin Roosevelt of hiding knowledge of the Pearl Harbor attack.

Despite its deep roots, political divisions have not commonly manifested themselves as perpetual congressional gridlock. Since the rise of the Tea Party during the 2010-midterm elections, Democrats and Republicans have made little bipartisan progress. The Fiscal Cliff-Sequester-Government Shutdown fiasco demonstrates the sheer level of dysfunction. To resolve the debt ceiling crisis in 2011 that almost led to a United States sovereign default, Democrats and Republicans constructed the elaborate Budget Control Act, which contained several harsh cuts to entitlement and defense programs. Designed to begin on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013, the Budget Control Act was meant to force both parties to resolve the issues behind the 2011 debt-ceiling crisis. Instead, no resolution was reached, and in January 2013 budget caps were enforced and sequestration was triggered. The dysfunction seemed to culminate with the 2013 Government Shutdown, triggered by Congress' refusal to approve funding for the federal government's activities. In response, the White House furloughed government employees (while maintaining military pay) until a temporary agreement could be reached between the Executive and Legislative branches.<sup>17</sup>

It is no wonder that congressional disapproval ratings have hovered near 75% since September 2011.<sup>18</sup> The majority of Americans have disapproved of the country's direction since June 2009. Such gridlock creates a disengaged political climate within the electorate, decreasing the quality of debate over major policy decisions. In many respects, the United States has persisted on autopilot for the last four to six years. Voters view the national legislature askance for failing to compromise. Ironically, the same voters elect representatives whose political positions and campaign attacks on opposing candidates leave little or no room for compromise.

This dysfunction has led to a significant reduction in military spending because of the Budget Control Act of 2011. Between the Obama administration's initial multi-billion-dollar defense spending cuts, reductions resulting from reduced operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and cuts mandated by sequestration, the defense budget over the preceding eight years has fallen to a level where pilots have insufficient training time in their planes, spare parts are not available, needed maintenance is continually postponed, ships' deployments have been extended, and weapons arsenals are sharply reduced.

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<sup>17</sup> Chris Isidore, "Federal shutdown: Who gets paid, and when," CNNMoney, October 9, 2013, accessed October 17, 2017, <http://money.cnn.com/2013/10/09/news/economy/shutdown-federal-workers-pay/>.

<sup>18</sup> "Congress and the Public," Gallup.com, accessed October 17, 2017, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1600/congress-public.aspx>.

A lack of major power competition redirected America's military focus from large-scale interstate warfare towards counterinsurgency and low-intensity conflict. America's two major ground campaigns, both fought against Saddam Hussein's massive conscript armies, were executed nearly flawlessly. During the First Gulf War, the US lost nearly the same number of troops to friendly fire as to combat with the enemy. The second invasion of Iraq in 2003 saw fewer than 200 American and allied combat deaths.

To counter America's supremacy in conventional warfare, US enemies in Iraq and Afghanistan adopted insurgent tactics that sought to undermine Western resolve over time and neutralize the effects of advanced American military technology. The US military has not fought a conventional battle since Operation Iraqi Freedom – instead, large-scale confrontations in cities amongst civilian populations have become the norm. Outside of urban centers, insurgents use geographic realities to their advantage, particularly in the mountainous east of Afghanistan.

Such prolonged counterinsurgency has visibly shifted the political debate over America's military options. This is most clearly reflected in the US' approach to counterinsurgency in the Middle East today. The trifecta of special forces, intelligence support for local forces, and airpower has replaced conventional American force deployments in the Middle East, where most of combat has occurred since 2000. There are benefits and drawbacks to the "light footprint" approach. It should be noted that forward deployments of air and naval forces have remained high even as their force structure has declined and aged. Regardless, such a policy is tailored towards low-intensity conflict, rather than high-end interstate warfare.

The Cold War provided direction for American strategic thought. The Soviet Union stood as the clear superpower enemy, against which considerable American resources had to be directed. Different global regions were viewed as part of a larger whole. America's continental European strategy was based on deterring a conventional Russian attack, while its posture in the Mediterranean, North Atlantic, and Western Pacific threatened Russia's flanks, preventing the Soviets from massing all their forces on the European Central Front. Policy in Africa and South America was designed to contain and, where possible, roll back communist political advances, while Middle Eastern policy maintained a steady energy supply for the West and preserved the only bastion of democracy in the region, Israel. American naval power facilitated every element of this strategy by providing immediate military support in these overseas areas, enabling the free transport of goods and supplies between regions, while ensuring open communications throughout the Western bloc.

Following the fall of the Soviet Union, America no longer had a global strategic enemy. Regional policy was directed at efficiently managing local crises and maintaining regional stability, rather than addressing global issues. The military became less of an instrument, engaged in various police actions and humanitarian interventions.

The clearest evidence of an absence of strategy is the decline of American naval power. Any global power requires strong sinews – without them, transferring assets and communicating with far-flung allies is impossible. Geographical and logistical factors force great powers to focus on maintaining seapower to ensure open, stable lines of

communication, since the majority of the earth's surface is covered by water. Following the Cold War, the role of the US Navy shifted from maintaining freedom of action in the maritime sphere to supporting ground operations, as threats to freedom of the seas largely disappeared with the demise of the Soviet Navy. Rather than viewing regional policy as part of an interconnected whole, American planners could view each region's issues as essentially separate, independent of a larger strategic context.

The rise of radical Islamic terrorism modified this tendency by signaling the existence of a truly global transnational threat. However, a concerted strategy to respond to radical Islamism is quite different from the strategy a state would pursue when confronting another state. Special forces, air power, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities are particularly prized in counter-terror campaigns, and while also important in the deterrence of conventional war among nation-states, capacity and power projection capabilities are prioritized. Protracted counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan further localized the American approach to strategy.

As a consequence, the United States is now under-equipped to handle systemic state threats. A rising Russia, China, and Iran, in tacit alliance with one another, are making a concerted attempt to revise the American-led international system by establishing hegemony in key areas. American grand strategy has not adjusted to this fact – regionalized land power and counterinsurgency operations still dominate strategic discussions.

Additionally, even if the nation were to move aggressively in the strategic direction that this work advocates, there are several important systemic hurdles to be overcome. The first is the dramatic decline in the shipbuilding and ship repair industrial base. Analyzing shipbuilding trends from the 1940s to the present indicates the link between merchant vessel construction and a sustained maritime industrial base – a critical asset for any naval power. At the end of the Second World War, the United States had eight naval shipyards, along with 64 private yards. Nearly two thirds of the private yards had been established by Navy or Maritime Commission efforts.<sup>19</sup> However, the postwar contraction undermined the shipbuilding industry. The government's 1951 "Mariner" program commissioned 35 new merchant ships, stimulating the industry during the early 1950s, but contraction continued. Nevertheless, all eight Navy shipyards remained operational for several years, despite a decline in manpower and productivity.<sup>20</sup> The last construction in a Navy shipyard was in the mid-1960s.

An international shipbuilding boom, facilitated by the rise of labor-intensive but simply constructed tankers, threatened the American shipbuilding industry throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Naval construction efforts in the 1960s facilitated an important change – the shift from Navy to private shipyards because of increasing private yard efficiency. Thus, Boston, Brooklyn, and San Francisco yards were closed, and no new projects were issued to Navy-managed yards.<sup>21</sup> The 1956 Suez Crisis sparked a major tanker boom.

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<sup>19</sup> Tim Colton and LaVar Huntzinger, *A brief history of shipbuilding in recent times* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 2002), 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Rather than shipping oil through the Mediterranean, transporters now had to circumnavigate Africa, leading to increasing transportation requirements and development of ever larger supertanker and supercargo carriers. The 1973 OPEC Crisis had the opposite effect, forcing several shipbuilders in the US and internationally into bankruptcy, although the industry recovered due to the offshore oil-drilling boom later in the decade.

President Reagan's policies had a mixed effect on overall shipbuilding. By defunding certain aspects of the Merchant Marine Act of 1920 – in tandem with the decline in offshore drilling – the Reagan administration forced a contraction in shipbuilding. The number of active yards declined by 40%, while employment was cut by over 30%.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, the Reagan-era 600-ship Navy represented a major potential windfall for the shipbuilding industry. However, without concurrent merchant vessel contracts, the resulting competition forced three major shipyards – General Dynamics (MA), Sun Shipbuilding (PA), and Bethlehem Steel (MD) – to cease operations. The six remaining private shipyards exclusively received naval, rather than merchant, contracts, indicating a lack of consistent future construction excluding another naval expansion.<sup>23</sup>

The post-Cold War period was an even worse period for American shipbuilding. American merchant vessel production essentially ceased due to several international factors that slashed merchant vessel construction prices. To support the industry, the government encouraged a merger and buyout scheme that in 2001 consolidated the six remaining yards under two private corporations, Huntington Ingalls Industries (HII) and General Dynamics (GD), significantly decreasing competition. Today, these two juggernauts still dominate the industry. Their various construction yards are all highly specialized. GD's Bath Iron Works constructs only the DDG 51 and DDG 1000 destroyers, while its Electric Boat yard produces only the *Virginia*-class attack submarine (SSN) (and soon, the *Columbia*-class ballistic missile submarine). HII's Newport News constructs nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and SSNs, while HII's Ingalls is the only shipyard to produce LPDs and LHAs amphibious warships (in addition to the DDG 51 destroyer and the Coast Guard "National Security Cutter"). GD's NASSCO builds auxiliary vessels for the Navy and some commercial vessels, and Austal and Marinette Marine take on smaller Navy contracts, but one can concentrate the bulk of the Navy's construction work in four private shipyards, run by two corporations.<sup>24</sup> The federal government operates four shipyards of its own (Portsmouth NH, Norfolk VA, Bremerton WA, and Pearl Harbor HI, five if one includes the Coast Guard Shipyard), but these are purely repair and maintenance locations, and thus must be distinguished from the private construction yards. In total, this drop indicates a nearly 90 percent decline from the 1940s.

The second hurdle is the shipbuilding and ship repair work force. Not only has it declined dramatically in numbers, but the nation's ability to grow the workforce to meet an increased demand is questionable. The 2010 Census indicated that only 0.3% of high-

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>24</sup> "U.S. Navy Shipbuilding," Shipbuilders.org, accessed October 17, 2017, <https://shipbuilders.org/us-navy-shipbuilding>.

school students pursue vocational/technical education.<sup>25</sup> A surge in construction or repair demands during wartime could disrupt other aspects of the US economy, as technical workers are siphoned away to defense projects. However, it bears mention that under peacetime conditions, the shipbuilding industry's speed at growing a capable workforce exceeds the government's ability swiftly to legislate and initiate major shipbuilding programs.

Third, American shipyards tend to lag behind foreign production centers in shipbuilding technologies, crippling the US' ability to create a major merchant fleet. A typical explanation for the increased productivity of Asian shipyards is the significantly lower labor costs. However, this fails to account for the significant technological differences between American and foreign yards. Foreign yards are often more automated than their American merchant ship builder counterparts which have been slower to invest in automation and modernization. Regulatory barriers preserve a scaled-back industrial base, and remove incentives for modernization. Under these circumstances what chance will the U.S. will have of competing on the international shipbuilding market?

A nation with a maritime-influenced grand strategy must view both the physical capacity of American shipyards and the workforce available as strategic assets worthy of consistent, methodical support.

These issues with America's maritime industry, and its industrial base more broadly, indicate a distinct lack of comprehension of the connection between global maritime and naval power. Somewhat surprisingly, America has been able to sustain its maritime power with solely naval strength. Mahan's study of the Dutch maritime decline indicates the Dutch focus erred by constructing a merchant fleet without a blue-water navy to protect it. America has made the opposite mistake – its navy grew in strength throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while its merchant fleet steadily declined.

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<sup>25</sup> *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, report, United States Census Bureau (Washington, D.C.: US Census Bureau, 2012). Census.gov, accessed October 2017, <https://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/12statab/educ.pdf>.

## ***Global Security Environment***

**A**fter the fall of the Soviet Union, conventional thinking subscribed to a theoretical “end of history.”<sup>26</sup> In this new era, democratization, international institutions, and global trade spelled an increasingly promising future. At a minimum, the United States had entered its “unipolar moment.”<sup>27</sup> The utopian international sages were right to an extent – the United States was unchallenged in its dominance for nearly a decade. Never had such a great power existed without a counterbalancing threat.

Modern events have demonstrated that the laws of nature governing international relations have not changed. Great power competition remains the defining feature of the international system, despite the complexity that non-state actors and globalization add to interstate conflict.

Today’s form of great power competition follows the same general pattern as other instances of great power competition throughout history. Multipolar great power competition typically features one or more challengers against a hegemon. The hegemon is not necessarily the most powerful state in the system at the time – instead, it has the most power to set norms of interaction, particularly when it comes to international trade. Great power competition typically includes competing alliance structures of varying degrees of rigidity. Lesser powers, despite lacking the major resources of the largest players, play an important role in tipping the balance between each side.

The modern international system fits the description of great power competition nearly exactly. The United States is the hegemon, using its military, economic, and diplomatic power, along with “soft power” cultural resources, to create and uphold international norms. Free trade and respect for sovereignty are the most critical of these norms – the American economic system requires global stability, which a stable international system facilitates more effectively than a fluid one. Arrayed against it are Russia and China, rising powers which are not yet as strong as the US, but formidable threats nonetheless. Both Russia and China have a desire to remake aspects of the system and have demonstrated a taste for disruption through territorial expansion and increased assertion of power. Russia has annexed Crimea, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, and backs proxy groups in Eastern Ukraine that are openly at war with the government in Kiev. Russia has also made a bid to replace the US as the major external power in the Middle East, deploying ground troops, air assets, and naval forces to support the brutal Assad regime in Syria in its fight against various rebel groups, both moderate and Islamist. Russia terms these operations “counterterrorism missions” – a clear manipulation of Western norms to facilitate an unambiguous power grab.

China has executed a similar strategy in the Pacific. By occupying various islands, and literally building islands on top of small maritime features, the Chinese have laid claim to various economically and strategically critical regions in the South and East China Seas. Chinese aircraft and ships have overtly threatened American and allied forces, tracking US movements, violating Japanese airspace, or otherwise harassing US and

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<sup>26</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The end of history?* (Washington, D.C.: National Affairs, Inc., 1989).

<sup>27</sup> Charles Krauthammer, *The unipolar moment* (Foreign Affairs, 1991).

allied military assets. The Chinese Coast Guard has been thoroughly militarized, fielding “converted” PLAN destroyers to outmuscle Japanese ships and assert their territorial claims. China, more so than Russia, has bought into the international economic system. However, that does not decrease the threat that China poses to the American-led international order. Both China and Russia have an interest in, at a minimum, revising the current global system. They view US leadership as an imposition on their power and an obstacle to regaining their former prestige.

The current situation resembles other historical great power conflicts. The Dutch Republic, England, and France chafed under Spanish hegemony from 1500 to the mid-1600s, and strove to shatter Spain’s power and remake the international system. Subsequently, Britain faced down Napoleonic France, and then a century later, Imperial Germany, both of which challenged the British-led international economic system that the United States later inherited after World War II. Nazi Germany’s bid for dominance was aimed at destroying the liberal international system, and replacing it with a perverse racialist dystopia. Even the Cold War can be viewed through this dynamic – USSR challenged the dominant United States, striving to overthrow the liberal order and replace it with a Marxist-Leninist international system. The theme is clear: challenging powers typically confront the dominant nation, attempting to revise the international system, and create norms that they consider favorable. States that favor the current international order confront this challenger, resulting in global conflict, unless deterrence and diplomatic maneuvering prevails.

Great power competition necessarily involves lesser states. Like any international conflict, the major player dictates overall strategic direction, but minor powers have an important role to play. Britain could not have countered French power on the continent with seapower alone. Without Dutch, Austrian, and German land forces – and Marlborough’s brilliance – Louis XIV would have dominated Europe. The situation repeated itself during the Seven Years’ War: British seapower together with a shifting continental confederation checked French expansionism a second time. The Napoleonic Wars once again demonstrated the crucial role of secondary powers in great power war. Despite his loss at Trafalgar, Napoleon may have been able to consolidate his rule over Europe and isolate Britain, had he not occupied the Iberian Peninsula, and handed Britain two ready-made allies--Spain and Portugal. Both World Wars required extensive collaboration between several great powers to check German expansion. Seapower alone, while important, could not decide the issue.

Today’s round of great power competition resembles the past. Russia and China have allied themselves with smaller states to increase their influence in critical regions. Overt Sino-Russian support for the Islamic Republic of Iran underscores this point. Iran’s territorial ambitions in the Middle East are well known – Iranian regular and paramilitary forces have trained, equipped, and in certain situations operated with friendly militant groups in Syria and Iraq. In Lebanon, the terrorist proxy group Hezbollah, bankrolled by Iranian cash and technical expertise, controls a significant portion of the country, while in Yemen, Iranian-backed Houthi rebels have destabilized the country and attacked United States ships. These maneuvers are part of Iran’s broader struggle for dominance in the Middle East, where victory would give it leadership of the Muslim world. Iranian ground forces have received direct support from the Russian

military in Syria and Iraq, while the Islamic Republic's military receives high-end technology from Russia, particularly in the realm of surface-to-air missile systems. China's connections with Iran are less overt – although the PRC has a major strategic interest in Iran's energy assets. If Beijing can loop Tehran into its "New Silk Road" and transit oil over land through Pakistan, it can offset the strategic value of the Strait of Malacca.

The United States is currently allied with various secondary powers. The NATO alliance and the American hub-and-spoke system in Asia are comprised of secondary states that provide the US with access to critical locations and augment its capabilities in various ways. In the Middle East, Israel and Saudi Arabia are the twin pillars of American power, while an increasingly unpredictable Turkey has become more nationally assertive and overtly Islamist. Clearly, the United States cannot forget the role of secondary powers in augmenting American strength. Without allies, no great power can hope to win a round of competition and conflict.

The clearest sign that Russia, China, and their allies aim to transform the current international order is their bid to control US access to critical maritime hubs. Global trade is the lifeblood of any international system. No mode of transportation can match long-range shipping, making freedom of navigation critical for the US-led international system. Additionally, open sealanes backed by powerful navies allow great powers to move their forces among different conflict hubs. Area denial (the creation of maritime zones wherein the combination of land-based sea-denial force and conventional seapower are merged to enable a regional naval power to potentially deny free passage of maritime traffic) as currently practiced by Russia, China, and Iran seeks to undermine both American conventional flexibility and America's superior global trade position—arguably the two most critical aspects of US power today. These three nations, along with various proxy groups, have created comprehensive Anti-Access Area Denial (A2AD) networks on land and at sea to achieve this goal. China mixes land-based ship-killer missiles and a large anti-ship missile equipped fighter/bomber force with a growing surface and subsurface fleet that includes amphibious power projection ships. Combined with the Chinese island building campaign, these moves are designed to keep the US out of strike range of critical objectives, while the Chinese military can project power and seize major chokepoints.

Russia has merged an equally sophisticated air defense network – Russian SAM technology is among the best in the world – with a hybrid warfare operational concept,<sup>28</sup> designed to create confusion in any conflict zone, and deny US forces access to potential staging points. Russia's modernized submarine force and surface fleet give it another potential tool to harass American shipping and counter US offensives. A new class of supersonic, submarine-launched conventional cruise missile provides Russia with a means to clandestinely threaten major targets in the Eastern United States as a means of

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<sup>28</sup> Frank Hoffman describes Hybrid Warfare thusly: "Any adversary that simultaneously employs a tailored mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behavior in the same time and battlespace to obtain their political objectives." Frank Hoffman, "On Not-So-New Warfare: Political Warfare vs Hybrid Threats," War on the Rocks, August 07, 2015, accessed October 17, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/07/on-not-so-new-warfare-political-warfare-vs-hybrid-threats/>.

conventional deterrence or counter-escalation. Russia's activity in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean underscores this policy goal. Putin's annexation of Crimea gives Russia virtual control of the Black Sea: post-coup Turkey, a neutered Ukraine, and a weak Romania and Bulgaria pose little threat to its naval forces. In the Mediterranean, Russia has refurbished its naval base on the Syrian coast and constructed an air defense network in Syrian territory, giving it parity with a shrunken US Sixth Fleet whose combat element consists of only four guided missile destroyers.

Iran has supplied its proxy groups, Hezbollah and the Houthi Rebels, with anti-ship missiles. Hezbollah fired on Israeli Navy warships during the 2006 Lebanon War, likely with Iranian advisors. The Houthi Rebels in Yemen have fired on American warships off the Yemeni coast multiple times – and while the level of Iranian involvement in this incident is unclear, it likely provided the Chinese-manufactured missiles. Iran's fleet of fast attack craft and mines are also capable of shutting down the Strait of Hormuz, at least temporarily, dealing a major blow to the global economy by choking off a significant amount of the world's oil supply. Before the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), such a step would amount to Iranian suicide. However, since the agreement's creation, Iran has expanded its economic ties outside of the Strait and will likely continue to do so through participation in China's Silk Road program.

In the worst case, Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean could allow Iran to deny America access to its oil shipments through a coordinated convoy campaign. Iran's Russian-made air defense systems round out the Islamic Republic's contribution to the A2AD network. Iran has also expressed recent ambitions to establish bases in Yemen or Syria, giving Tehran a foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean and strengthening the Russo-Chinese hand on Europe's vulnerable flank.

Finally, terrorist groups create instability and deny the US access to various staging areas. Although most Islamist insurgencies are in the Levant, certain groups have branched out to the North African coastline. ISIS occupied the city of Sirte, Libya until August 2016. Although Islamist groups have not yet thoroughly attacked maritime targets, it is a matter of time before an enterprising Jihadist organization copies the methods of the Somali pirates. This would include harassing international shipping activity, likely in the Mediterranean, and replicating the techniques of the Tamil Tigers, using a small number of 'suicide boats' to attack more powerful naval forces. Russia, China, and Iran, augmented by affiliated and nonaffiliated insurgencies and terrorist organizations, have constructed the makings of a major A2AD network internationally; it remains to be seen how successful these forces could be in integrating their efforts. It does appear though, that these states have successfully "balanced" against the United States, and currently present a de facto united opposition to American power and interests internationally.

By imposing restrictions on regional trade, these states can harm America's global position. International commerce both enables the US' economic power and gives it significant leverage over smaller states. Localized Russian, Chinese, and Iranian hegemony could harm America's access to global trade, while also impeding US access to critical resources and geography. However, recent trends towards economic localization can have a similar effect. International economic organizations are breaking down. The

WTO has been in gridlock since the 2001 Doha Round; states have been able to make up for this through bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements, but protectionist rhetoric from major European and American political parties threatens these trade deals. The European Union's problems will only continue to mount after Brexit, with the pressure of growing economic nationalism leading potentially to the regionalization of trade. Regionalization of trade and the accompanying political phenomenon of "spheres of interest" are particularly destabilizing.

Particularly since Russia's annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin has used multiple methods to subvert international responses to its aggression. These include using unmarked conventional forces, sponsoring and controlling nominally unaffiliated militia groups, spreading disinformation through state-owned media outlets like *Russia Today*, undermining the credibility of Western media sources through "anonymous" leaks, and manipulating supposed watchdog organizations like WikiLeaks to attack Western governments and news outlets. Russia's use of semi-affiliated combat assets fulfills the first criterion – the West has no similarly variable assets to respond to Russia's moves, forcing NATO to choose between ineffective sanctions and "defensive military aid" and risky further escalation.

"Lawfare" is also an integral and necessary element of hybrid warfare. It relies on undermining and questioning established elements of international law in order to create a new "reality" that enables an aggressor to cloud international response to its illegal actions. Combined with its media offensive, lawfare upholds the second pillar of hybrid doctrine. Manipulating international law to delegitimize an opponent is not a revolutionary tactic. Prussia's Chancellor Otto von Bismarck employed an early form of lawfare in the prelude to the Franco-Prussian War. He baited Louis-Napoleon into demanding the French annexation of Luxembourg as a strategic buffer with Prussia, and then used it to portray the Emperor as the aggressor, thereby isolating the Second Empire internationally and regionalizing the upcoming conflict.

Modern lawfare has the similar effect – it paints the aggressor as the victim by delegitimizing the claims of another nation. Russia has manipulated the self-determination principles that underpin the UN charter to justify its actions in Crimea and Georgia. Russia used alleged NATO violations of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty after it suspended its participation in the agreement to justify withdrawing from it fully. In March 2017, Vice-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Paul Selva, told the House Armed Services Committee that Russia has violated the INF treaty.<sup>29</sup> Consistent with previous Soviet operating practice, Russia rhetorically attacked the US for its supposed counter-violations of the agreement. In all, these efforts represent a strategy to displace Western norms and institutions to undermine American and allied credibility. China has also engaged in lawfare to a limited degree, using the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to justify its territorial claims. For example, Beijing argues that its artificial islands are akin to coastlines, thereby giving China exclusive rights to the resources within the island's immediate vicinity and control over

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<sup>29</sup> Michael R. Gordon, "Russia Has Deployed Missile Barred by Treaty, U.S. General Tells Congress," *The New York Times*, March 08, 2017, , accessed October 17, 2017, [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/08/us/politics/russia-inf-missile-treaty.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/08/us/politics/russia-inf-missile-treaty.html?_r=0).

the waterways surrounding it.<sup>30</sup> America's lack of accession to UNCLOS, combined with the complexity of the legal situation, make action extremely difficult for America and its Pacific partners. China also manipulates international law in its interactions with North Korea to give it undue legitimacy. China has supported multiple rounds of sanctions against the DPRK, but in more recent sanctions resolutions (UNSC 2276 and 2321 – 2016), China ensured a clause that permitted exports from North Korea that were for the "people's livelihood," to prevent another famine due to declining trade volumes. This has allowed Chinese firms to "self-certify" their cargo, enabling China to do business with North Korea while maintaining the façade of international cooperation. Thus, China can decry any American attempts to pressure it into increased sanctions as unduly aggressive.

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<sup>30</sup> China also uses lawfare to justify its interpretations of UNCLOS claiming that since traditional international law was dictated by the great powers, and excluded weaker and developing states China is reinterpreting international law according to its own needs.

### ***Conventional Deterrence***

**T**he US Navy defines deterrence as “The prevention from action by fear of the consequences. Deterrence is a state of mind brought about by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction.”<sup>31</sup> Throughout much of the Cold War, US focus on deterrence brought about by the threat of a nuclear response (strategic deterrence) overshadowed that of deterrence by the threat of conventional response (conventional deterrence). This was sensible, given the thousands of nuclear warheads that the Soviet Union and the United States had allocated against targets of value to each other. The fall of the Soviet Union led to a decline in the centrality of strategic deterrence in US national security planning and a concomitant emphasis on conventional deterrence against less powerful, regional states.

Conventional deterrence as currently practiced by the modern US Navy reflects a preference for deterrence by punishment, wherein a potential aggressor is deterred by the threat of the great damage to targets of considerable value to the nation or regime that would follow the aggression. This threat is represented by the overwhelming combat power of the naval strike force lurking over the horizon, able to project power from the sky, the sea, and on the land. The implicit message is “do not step out of line, because if you do, we (the US) will retaliate and cause great damage to your nation, and eventually your aggression will be reversed.” From a naval perspective, the key to enabling deterrence by punishment is the maintenance nearby of considerable combat power capable of delivering this level of punishment and reversing aggression. Where middling powers are concerned (such as those that have dominated American security planning in the post-Cold-War era), deterrence by punishment is an efficient tool, as it relies on what is, for want of a better term, a “zone defense” approach, in which US forces might not be able to initially deny the fruits of aggression, but forces close by could rather easily reverse the aggression as they aggregate. Efficiency in deterrence has been valued higher than effectiveness out of the realization that there were no great powers capable of challenging US interests and therefore, a more economical approach could be pursued to deal with the regional aggression of lesser states. This assumption can no longer be made, and the nation must switch from a posture supporting deterrence by punishment to one of deterrence by denial.<sup>32</sup>

Neither China nor Russia can challenge US global maritime dominance, and neither is likely to be able to do so in the foreseeable future. Both however, are now capable and will be increasingly likely to assert naval power in regions of the world where the United States has vital national interests. Proximity and power combine to create situations in which either nation could quickly launch an attack on a modest scale to achieve limited (but antithetical to US interests) objectives. After achieving the objective, the United States would then be left with the choice of accepting the new status quo, or mounting an effort to reverse the aggression. Were the aggressor a nation other than a great power,

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<sup>31</sup> *Naval doctrine publication 1: naval warfare* (Washington, DC: Dept. of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations and Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 2010), 48.

<sup>32</sup> Glenn Snyder first proposed a theory of deterrence that defined both punishment and denial in his book, Glenn Herald. Snyder, *Deterrence and defense: toward a theory of national security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

such an approach by the United States would be sensible and credible. Where China and Russia are concerned, this approach to *faits accompli* aggression lacks credibility, as there is reasonable doubt (among both Americans and allies) about whether the US would risk broader, escalated conflict with a great power to reverse an isolated, limited (but achieved) gain. Additionally, even if the US were to mount a counter-attack (either with allies or unilaterally), international pressure to end the conflict would come quickly and loudly over realistic fears of economically ruinous conflict, jeopardizing the prospects for success in reversing even limited aggression.

The United States should alter its approach to conventional naval deterrence to maintain freedom of the seas in the face of great powers that seek to impose limits in their “near abroad.” The global explosion of free trade and open markets that followed the fall of the Soviet Union is a direct result of freedom of the seas underwritten largely by US naval power. The re-emergence of great power dynamics is likely to result in regional pressures on freedom of the seas and global trade, as both China and Russia seek to reduce US power and influence while increasing their own regional posture. This dynamic will be especially pronounced in the Western Pacific, the Mediterranean, and the waters of the North Atlantic/Norwegian Sea/Baltic Sea. It is in these waters that the US Navy will routinely interact with Chinese and Russian naval forces; it is in these waters that the US Navy will routinely sail underneath a growing threat from land-based sea-denial forces; and it is in and near these waters that numerous potential objectives for Chinese and Russian aggression are located. Should the US present a less capable and credible deterrent in these waters, either power could be emboldened to aggression, and the United States would be left with the decision to pursue a large-scale, escalated conflict to reverse the aggression or accept it.

Implications on US naval force structure will be covered later in this work. From the perspective of conventional deterrence, fielded naval forces must be numerous, distributed, sufficiently networked, tailored to the most likely regional aggression scenarios, capable of withstanding an opening salvo from the aggressor and then discharging significant numbers of offensive weapons. In other words, they must be powerful enough to dissuade or deny the aggression from existing capabilities and not by the threat of an armada days or weeks away.

### ***Implications for Force Structure***

**A**merican seapower must be postured forward in both strength and numbers, capable of presenting an instantaneous and powerful response to regional aggression by China or Russia, with additional capacity close at hand to form the vanguard of a larger, joint response if required. Therefore, the deterrence of great power conflict begins with ensuring that potential aggressors understand that the “first move” will have costs, and that the US Navy is organized, trained, equipped, and employed forward to raise those costs.

A full fleet architectural development and force structure assessment is beyond the scope of this work. Fortunately, recent scholarship provides a more than suitable example to reference. The February 2017 report by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) (“Restoring American Seapower: A New Fleet Architecture for the United States Navy”) is a superb explication of the consequences to fleet design of a Navy that must alter its approach to conventional deterrence, making recommendations across the spectrum of force structure, readiness cycles, employment posture, concepts of operation, technology implementation, and innovative force packages. One of the authors of this Hudson Institute study participated in the CSBA effort, and we enthusiastically support its basic assumptions and force structure recommendations, which we reproduce in Appendix A. Key elements of those recommendations from a strategic perspective include:

- **A new posture for deployed forces.** The most innovative contribution of the CSBA Fleet Architecture report is its proposal to re-allocate the way naval forces are apportioned for deterrence and warfighting. Taking as its entering argument the ineffectiveness of today’s deployed naval force posture against limited great power aggression directed at objectives that are geographically proximate, the CSBA report creates two separate and distinct “forces” within the Navy fleet. The first is the “Deterrence Force,” which is characterized by heavily-armed surface and subsurface forces, the totality of the Navy’s amphibious force, and significant land-based manned and unmanned intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets. The function of the Deterrence Force is to provide a nearby (able to launch strikes within 72 hours), powerful, credible deterrent tailored to the capabilities of a highly competent adversary. This force would be constituted to substantially increase the firepower available to a geographic commander as both a deterrent and as the force that immediately acts to deny or delay the fruits of aggression. After discharging its offensive weapons, the Deterrence Force would redeploy for re-arming and logistics, to be replaced by the “Maneuver Force,” which is a deployed carrier strike force made up of the combined power of two carrier strike groups, submarines, unmanned vehicles, and a squadron of Marine Corps afloat prepositioned ships. The purpose of the Maneuver Force is to remove from high-end Navy force structure the requirement for day-to-day current operations and presence missions, which frees these forces to train, operate, and experiment on the requirements for fighting and winning high-end warfare at and from the sea. Continuously deployed in the Indo-Asia Pacific, the Maneuver Force will position punishing force less than 72 hours

away from being able to reinforce combat operations underway involving the Deterrence Force. Because of the tight timelines involved in a Russian advance westward, the Deterrence Force in the North Atlantic resembles that Indo-Asia Pacific Maneuver Force, in that it is built around an on-station aircraft carrier strike group.

- **Dramatic increase in the size of the Combat Logistics Force (CLF).** The CSBA report rightly points to two important changes that must be made when considering the size of the CLF. First, current methods of sizing the logistics force based on peacetime employment insufficiently account for the demands of wartime resupply across large theaters of war. Second, today's force mix of twelve dry cargo ships, fifteen oilers, and two ammunition ships results in an over-capacity of dry cargo and an under-capacity of fuel to support distributed operations.
- **Hybrid force of high/low mix aircraft carriers.** Large, nuclear-powered aircraft carriers currently form the backbone of the Navy's current posture around the world. A force of ten carriers (one below the congressionally mandated figure of eleven) has inadequately provided regional presence in only two areas of the world (Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean, and Western Pacific) since Congress granted the Navy a waiver to dip to ten carriers upon retirement of the USS ENTERPRISE (CVN 65) in 2013. Because this force is stretched to meet even the barest requirements for presence in the current force employment posture, there is rarely an opportunity for the carrier force to exercise and experiment on the kind of large, integrated, multi-carrier tactics that would be essential to high end warfare against a great power.<sup>33</sup> As a recent study by the Hudson Institute<sup>34</sup> showed, carrier based tactical aviation has a significant role in the high end fight, but the manner in which carriers are employed today sub-optimizes their capabilities. The CSBA study advocates for a mix of high end, large, nuclear-powered carriers and smaller carriers (CVL's or "light carriers") that would likely be conventionally powered. The smaller carriers would form the backbone of naval peacetime presence forces ("Deterrence Force"), while the large CVN's would largely be paired for multi-carrier exercises and deployments in the Indo-Asia Pacific that stress the concepts and capabilities required to defeat high end, great power competitors.<sup>35</sup> Known as the "Maneuver Force," it would consist of US West Coast and Pacific-based CVNs, numerous escorts and unmanned vehicles, and the prepositioned afloat ships devoted to large-scale US Marine Corps ground operations. East Coast CVNs would be part of the Deterrence

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<sup>33</sup> See 2015 Seth Cropsey, Bryan G. McGrath, and Timothy A. Walton, *Sharpening the Spear: The Carrier, the Joint Force, and High-End Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute, 2015), <https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/files/publications/201510SharpeningtheSpearTheCarriertheJointForceandHighEndConflict.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> As with all naval platforms there are costs and benefits associated with all choices: Conventionally-powered carriers require constant refueling and additional oilers would have to be built. There is also the possibility that as pressure on national resources grows, CVLs could be misperceived by Congress or a future administration as an acceptable substitute for the larger and far more capable nuclear carrier.

Force, as their presence in the North Atlantic would be part of a muscular deterrence posture aimed at stopping Russian aggression in the Baltics, or any Russian effort to interrupt US seaborne communications with the European continent.

- **Increased forward basing and stationing of manned and unmanned vehicles.** The Deterrence Force laid out by CSBA is largely made up of forward stationed small surface combatants (frigates and missile patrol boats) with rotating crews, and larger, single-crewed ships (DDG, SSN) that deploy from the US and bases around the world. Maritime patrol and unmanned aircraft will operate from numerous bases in geo-strategically important regions, and unmanned vehicle detachments (undersea and surface) will also be forward deployed where they can create uncertainty for Russia, China, and Iran. Additionally, the several unmanned vehicle support ships in the proposal will act as floating support bases to a large variety of unmanned vehicles operating in all domains.
- **A new aircraft carrier air wing.** The CSBA fleet architecture directly addresses the long-term decline in the striking range of the aircraft carrier air wing by advocating for a long range, stealthy, unmanned strike vehicle, in addition to a new outer air battle fighter that can conduct offensive anti-air warfare at long ranges from the main body with the aid of unmanned, carrier-based refueling vehicles. The Maneuver Force air wings, freed from the demands of day-to-day current operations and presence, will have the time and resources necessary to train for fully integrated multi-carrier operations, as opposed to the cooperative operations currently undertaken by aircraft carriers when they infrequently operate together.

The fleet architecture developed by the team at CSBA is just short of 350 ships (using current counting rules), with a significant increase in the use of platforms not currently counted. These platforms include missile patrol craft, extra large unmanned underwater vehicles (XLUUV) and extra large unmanned surface vehicles (XLUSV). This force would cost approximately 20% more than the current Navy budget to acquire, man, train, equip, and operate. Moving to a maritime grand strategy could suggest the possibility for re-allocation of resources within the defense budget from other purposes, but this would be short-sighted. A maritime grand strategy for the United States does not necessarily imply that the need for land power and air power have been diminished, or that the Army and the Air Force would receive less money. What *is* implied by a maritime grand strategy is that the capabilities of the Navy, the Coast Guard, and to a lesser extent, the Marine Corps, would be featured in the defense portion of the nation's strategy and would be resourced accordingly.

## **Recommendations**

**T**he creation of a maritime grand strategy is not the goal of this paper, although advocating for such a strategy clearly is. Formulation of a maritime grand strategy would necessarily be a broad government undertaking, with military, diplomatic, geo-strategic, industrial, workforce, and budgetary implications, to name a few. The following recommendations are offered to spur additional thought and action: Congress should create a bi-partisan commission on grand strategy, with appointees designated by the President and the leadership of both parties. This commission should be staffed and funded for two years of work. It should hold hearings and work in both unclassified and classified forums. It should be tasked to create a public document and a classified annex outlining its strategy for an era of great power competition. Essential to the work of this commission would be a series of actionable recommendations to the Executive and Legislative Branches essential to implement the strategy.

- The President and Congress should work together to increase the size and capability of American naval power, namely the Navy and Marine Corps. Because of the time and capital-intensive nature of naval buildups, this action cannot be deferred any longer. Findings of the commission recommended immediately above could be woven into the long-term building plan, but ample evidence shows that American seapower is insufficiently constituted for what is being asked of it even today. This larger Navy should more closely balance the priority of sea control and power projection, and it must return in force to the European theater of operations.
- The Secretary of the Navy should commission a study to determine the sufficiency of the naval industrial base, and make recommendations to include capital improvements, workforce and vocational/technical training programs, and sustainment/repair enhancements. The naval industrial base must be considered a strategic asset, and this asset cannot be allowed to decline further. The Secretary of Defense should commission a parallel study to determine the sufficiency of the nation's ground and air forces' industrial bases.
- The Secretaries of State and Defense should work together (and with the commission cited above) to identify nations that are geo-strategically critical to the deterrence of great power conflict with China and or Russia, and shape our diplomatic efforts accordingly. Basing rights, site preparation, bi-lateral exercises, and programs to increase military preparedness (to include Foreign Military Sales (FMS)) should be considered.
- Today's level of national spending on American seapower is insufficient to grow the fleet from its current level of 276 ships to the previous Administration's goal of a 306-ship fleet three decades from now, much less the 350-ship goal that the current Administration seeks by the year 2048. Without dominant seapower the US would have achieved neither its current wealth nor helped establish and preserve the international order on which greater future prosperity depends. The loss of dominant seapower would likely

result in China's ability to set the rules that govern international shipping. It would end the strategic advantage of being able to invade any other coastal state in the world while being entirely secure from invasion. The US has enjoyed this advantage for well over a century. Measured against foreseeable increases in non-discretionary spending, the cost of modernizing American seapower and preserving its global superiority is slight. The alternative to making the small sacrifice needed for maintaining the US' competitive advantage at sea is to follow other great seapowers that have forgotten the source of their greatness and lost the foundation of their economic strength along with their security.

## **Conclusion**

**T**he United States arrived at its current position as the world's foremost defender of a stable international order without seeking it. National wealth was an important contributor to the US' emergence on the international stage: a prosperous state has an interest in protecting its commerce and possesses the ability to defend it. Alexander Hamilton's vision of a thriving commercial republic had been realized by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A decade before the American Civil War, the US possessed the largest GDP in the world after England, France, and Germany.<sup>36</sup> By 1870 America's GDP was second only to England's, but just barely: the former amounted to \$98.3 billion Geary-Khamis international dollars, the latter, \$100.1 billion units of the same currency calculated on the value of a US dollar between 1990 and 2000.<sup>37</sup> American prosperity enabled the strength of its armed forces but the US military expanded and contracted parallel to the nation's wars. For most of US history a large peacetime military was unknown.

America was born in the struggle to escape the will of a distant outside power. The nation's foreign policy is rooted in non-intervention and respect for sovereignty. World War I did not change this. But American power proved decisive in that struggle as it did in World War II. These conflicts devastated large parts of Europe and Asia and killed millions. Left largely unscathed was the US, whose leadership, supported by an often generously funded military, led the West in opposing Soviet communism. Unfortunately, the successful conclusion of the Cold War did not result in a more peaceful world. The end of superpower competition released pressures around the world that emerged in the form of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, tribal warfare in Africa, failed states, global terrorism, religious strife within one of the world's most populous religions, nuclear proliferation, regional arms races, and the rise of near peer competitors. Russia sought to regain status lost in recent decades. China aimed to reverse injustices of previous centuries as well as fulfill its leaders' expansive ideas of national destiny. Additionally, other lesser but malevolent dictatorships, notably Iran and North Korea, pursued their respective apocalyptic visions. Throughout this period, the US remained the only nation inclined by principle and enabled by power to resolve large crises benevolently with no other object than to advance its self-interest in a modicum of world order.

Today, the US still faces substantial foreign policy and national security challenges. The Western Pacific and the eastern rim of Asia, in particular the Korean Peninsula and the South and East China Seas have become potential flashpoints. This is a region where American commitments to allies and partners underscore commercial and power relationships on which the US economy and security rest significantly. An ambitious and increasingly well-armed China as well as a dangerously unpredictable regime in Pyongyang are likely to increase their challenge to the US in the foreseeable future.

Despite such intractable problems as low birth rates and high mortality rates, reduced oil revenues, and extremely limited economic growth, Russia increased its military spending

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<sup>36</sup> Angus Maddison (1926-2010), September 3, 2009, accessed October 17, 2017, <http://www.ggd.net/maddison/oriindex.htm>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

by over 400 percent between when Vladimir Putin became prime minister in 1999 and 2015.<sup>38</sup> Putin is updating Russia's nuclear forces and modernizing its ageing Soviet-era fleet. This growing threat will complicate US efforts to deter China and help Moscow tighten its grip on NATO's southeastern flank as it supports the unitary theater of the Black Sea and East Mediterranean.

Russia acts as well as plans. The Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea, its launching and support of a civil war to seize effective control of the Donbass region of Ukraine, and its attacks to dismantle Georgia on the eastern shore of the Black Sea are all part of an aggressive campaign aimed at reversing what Putin described as the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century-- the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the accompanying diminution of Soviet-controlled territory and global political-military influence. Russian military operations in support of Syria and its naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean are bringing within sight a restoration of Moscow's influence in the Middle East that ended 45 years ago when Anwar Sadat expelled Russian military advisors from Egypt. Today, Russia seeks to expand its Mediterranean position with contracts to help develop Libyan oil fields<sup>39</sup> and use Libya's unrelenting internal violence as an opportunity to gain a foothold in the Maghreb.<sup>40</sup>

The list of global frictions is long. Were they to combine, the sum would be daunting. Revived mercantilism with its poles in Moscow and Beijing threatens the free trade practices that have multiplied global wealth since the end of World War II. The revanchist territorial aims of the two states place at risk the nearly universal idea of inviolable sovereignty and self-determination, whose prospering fortune was the result of fascism and communism's defeat. Iran, North Korea, and non-state terror add to the toxic mixture in their supporting roles as fanatic actors restrained neither by conventional morality nor, in some cases, a normal human fear of death.

After years of sporadic, hesitant, less-than-successful, or simply non-existent American engagement, US options have narrowed. Syria is a magnet for radical jihadists from around the world. They receive combat training and experience and return with lethal skills to their homes in Europe, Central, South and Southeastern Asia. US options against ISIS are frozen between support for successful Kurdish fighters and the hostility toward the Kurds by Turkey, which remains a NATO member. Russia pushes on the Black Sea littoral and Baltic States where NATO's ability to honor its defensive obligations offers a potential contest between an adversary's swift mobilization and the alliance's slow deliberative process. US choices on the Korean Peninsula constrict as the North increases its ability to devastate Seoul with artillery and missile barrage. Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile progress puts Japan at risk and might eventually threaten the mainland US. China continues its slow-motion expansion of

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<sup>38</sup> "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database," SIPRI.org, accessed October 17, 2017, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

<sup>39</sup> Patrick Wintour, "Russia increases involvement in Libya by signing oil deal," *The Guardian*, February 21, 2017, accessed October 17, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/21/russia-increases-involvement-libya-signing-oil-deal-rosneft>.

<sup>40</sup> Alec Luhn, "Russian special forces sent to back renegade Libyan general – reports," *The Guardian*, March 14, 2017, accessed October 17, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/14/russian-special-forces-deployed-in-egypt-near-libyan-border-report>.

military power into the South China Sea aided by calibrated diplomatic and lawfare campaigns.

The US' potential adversaries can barely hope to defeat the US in a traditional conflict today, though this is changing. But successful small or medium-sized challenges, in arms, commerce, and diplomacy can also tip the scales. If Russia could deliver a sudden victory in eastern Ukraine, or encourage the Bosnian Serbs to rise up against the peace of the Dayton Accords, or if one of the Baltic States might be swiftly returned to Moscow's orbit by force or its threat, European security and the Atlantic alliance would come under exceptional strain.

Similarly, in East Asia: China's overnight seizure of another state's territory, or a surprise attack against Taiwan, or a lightning-fast confrontation over Japan's Senkaku Islands could yield important gains for Beijing that would present a US president with the equally undesirable choice of accepting a *fait accompli* or initiating a sustained military campaign to reverse. The size and power of the US military has molded its adversaries' strategy. Instead of frontal assault, they look for advantage in anti-access/area denial strategies, hybrid approaches, cyber-attacks, and asymmetrical warfare, seeking always to exploit geographic proximity and the swiftness of action it allows to achieve and consolidate gain.

Our idea of conventional deterrence should adapt to anticipate shifts in the challenges we face. As the rise of near-competitors increases the prospect of great power conflicts, projecting power and applying it to defeat enemies becomes critical. However, the US should concentrate on deterring lightning-swift provocations no less than conducting sustained combat operations if smaller provocations and aggression escalate. The ability to gather forces to restore the status quo demands time and the marshalling of political capital. These critical tools are less useful in deterring a determined enemy from taking smaller bites. Yet smaller bites are what we likely face in the foreseeable future. Successful deterrence will discourage an adversary from probing our ability to turn back a lightning-grab or test our will by using larger forces if a power grab were to succeed. Large aircraft carriers remain important in the Navy's arsenal as instruments of major prolonged warfare. But the points of friction between the US and its adversaries have multiplied and show no sign of retreating. US seapower will need to rely increasingly on larger numbers of smaller, highly lethal vessels to deliver the immediate, punishing, and unacceptable losses that can persuade an enemy that this is not the right day to challenge the US. This requires American seapower to shift its emphasis from power projection toward sea control. Our idea of deterrence must change and with it our strategy and ships.

## **Appendix**

An excerpt from “Restoring American Seapower: A New Fleet Architecture for the United States Navy,” published by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments <sup>41</sup>

### *Executive Summary and Conclusion*

Today’s Navy emphasizes efficiency over effectiveness. This was a rational reaction to the presumed end of great power competition with the fall of the Soviet Union. In the decades that followed, the US Navy developed a process to affordably maintain a continuous presence of deployed forces in each CCDR AOR. These forces may not be able to stop aggression by regional powers, but could support an eventual response by follow-on forces as was done in Kosovo, Iraq, and Libya.

This approach to conventional deterrence will not likely work against the potential great power aggressors of the 2030s, who will have much greater military capabilities than past regional adversaries and probably seek a quick, decisive victory over their adversaries. Efforts to reverse the results of aggression after the fact would require a much larger conflict and would likely have global consequences that would create international pressure to reach a quick settlement.

To be deterred in the 2030s, aggressors must be presented with the possibility that their goals will be denied or that the immediate costs to pursue them will be prohibitively high.

The architecture proposed by this report would achieve that effect with more powerful day-to-day Deterrence Forces tailored by region. Bolstering that immediate deterrent would be the Maneuver Force, which in peacetime would hone its skills in multi-carrier, cross-domain, high-end warfare. These two forces would be comprised of some of the same elements, but packaged and supported differently.

This proposed fleet architecture emphasizes effectiveness over efficiency. Built on new operating concepts the Navy is already pursuing and incorporating a new approach to conventional deterrence, the new architecture offers the prospect of protecting and sustaining America’s security and prosperity, as well as that of our friends and allies around the world, in the decades ahead. Deterring great power war demands the readiness to contest and win it—and a fleet that supports this approach.

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<sup>41</sup> Bryan Clark, Peter Haynes, Jesse Sloman, Timothy Walton, “Restoring American Seapower: A New Fleet Architecture for the United States Navy,” Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, February 2017, <http://csbaonline.org/research/publications/restoring-american-seapower-a-new-fleet-architecture-for-the-united-states->

*Conclusions and Recommendations*

The Navy will need a new fleet architecture to enable the deterrence of aggression by great power competitors by the 2030s. The militaries of Russia and China will likely continue to improve their capability and proficiency, enabling them to pursue territorial ambitions in their near abroad—for example, Russia’s in the Baltic NATO allies or China’s in the Senkaku Islands. If they successfully achieve those objectives, America’s security assurances will lose credibility, and US alliances will suffer. If great powers pursue aggression, and US forces cannot defeat them or control escalation, the ensuing great power conflict could have disastrous global consequences. The United States must deter these conflicts rather than fight them to protect worldwide economic and political systems.

The fleet architecture proposed by this study will support a new posture for US forces designed to deny and punish great power aggression using new operating concepts resulting from a combination of emerging technologies and new methods of achieving warfighting objectives. To implement these operating concepts, US naval forces will need new force packages, platforms, weapons, and sensors and to sustain the required overseas posture. They will also need to employ new basing arrangements and modified readiness cycles.

To establish this fleet architecture by the 2030s, when future CCDRs and national leaders will need it, the Navy should pursue the following initiatives detailed in this report:

- Focus Navy force development strategy on future competitions. The Navy’s Strategic Plans and related documents used to guide budget development emphasize current concerns or success in canonical large-scale warfighting scenarios. Instead of conducting major combat operations or fighting terrorists, future naval forces will be needed as the front line for steady-state deterrence of great powers; this should drive naval force development decisions over the next decade.
- Identify a new overarching strategic concept for how US naval forces address great power competitors. Today’s maritime strategy directs a wide range of naval responsibilities and does not establish the most important responsibilities of naval forces and how, overall, these responsibilities should be pursued. This study argues deterring great power conflicts should be the overarching responsibility of naval forces, and they must pursue that objective through a denial and punishment approach to deterrence.
- Develop new doctrine and requirements for new warfighting concepts. The Navy’s current approaches to important missions such as ASW, AMD, and SUW still reflect an expectation that operating environments will be relatively permissive and that naval missions will be conducted in the context of large-scale campaigns after all the required forces have flowed to theater. The short, sharp conflicts great power adversaries may pursue will require naval forces be able to quickly respond and defeat the aggression.

- Begin establishing new force packages that can execute current and future warfighting concepts. The small menu of force packages supported by today's FRTP are efficient to train and certify but do not support the new ways of operating that will be necessary in the future against great powers and highly capable regional powers. The Navy's current effort to prepare and deploy SAGs for SUW operations in the Pacific is a good start toward expanding the range of force packages and better aligning them with new operating concepts.
- Prioritize weapons and sensor development to support new operating concepts. The operating concepts needed to deter and fight great power competitors require new or modified weapons that enable distributed operations by smaller forces in contested areas and exploit the effectiveness of mission kills or suppression of enemy operations in denying aggression. Some of the Navy's current efforts are still oriented toward operations in relatively permissive environments by large, concentrated groups of forces.
- Implement basing changes that will support a posture that will help deter great power aggression. The key to deterring great power competitors in the future is an effective naval posture, because naval forces can be positioned near the objectives of great power aggressors and are less subject to concerns or coercion of allied host nations in the region. The Navy and CCDRs are working on some of these changes already, but it is unclear if their initiatives reflect a strategic approach to improving future posture in specific ways.
- Revise the Navy's readiness processes to improve the ability of naval forces to learn and adapt. The Navy's current training plans do not afford the time or focus needed to develop and implement new approaches to address changing adversary capabilities and objectives. The Navy will need to tailor training and preparations for deployment to what forces are likely to encounter. This will need to be complemented by more tailored deployments that ensure deployed forces are focused on the region and operations for which they were prepared.
- Evolve shipbuilding plans to create a fleet better able to deter great power aggression. The Navy could develop a more effective fleet within the constraints imposed by current budget caps. As described in Chapter 9 of the CSBA report, even a shipbuilding budget that is only 4 percent larger would enable the construction of additional LX(R)s, small surface combatants, and extra-large unmanned vehicles that would dramatically improve the conventional deterrence capability of deployed naval forces by implementing new operating concepts for key missions in contested areas.

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