

On Naval Power

By MILAN N. VEGO

All too often, the terms *naval power* and *sea power* are used interchangeably. But naval power, properly understood, refers to a direct and indirect source of *military power* at sea. Obviously, the main components of a naval power are the navy, coast guard, and marines/naval infantry and their shore establishment. The term *sea power* (coined in 1849) originally referred to a nation having a formidable naval strength. Today, this term's meaning is much broader; it now describes the entirety of the use of the sea by a nation. Specifically, a sea (or maritime) power comprises political, diplomatic, economic, and military aspects of sea use.¹ Naval power played an extremely important and often vital role in the lives of many maritime nations.

This scenario is not going to change in the future despite claims to the contrary by some influential thinkers. The threat of major conflict at sea might look distant or even unlikely today. Yet it would be unwise to exclude the possibility altogether. Very often, the fact that naval power might play an important part in conventional deterrence—or, in the case of blue water navies such as the U.S. Navy, in nuclear deterrence—is either overlooked or ignored. Navies, and coast guards in particular, perform important and diverse tasks in peacetime and in operations short of war.

The Threat

The range of threats in the maritime domain is broad. The conventional threats in peacetime include claims of the riparian states in regard to the boundaries of the

economic exclusion zone (EEZ) and activities there, the extent of the territorial waters and the rights of innocent passage, and illicit fishing. Conventional threats include low-intensity conflict such as insurgencies and the possibility of a high-intensity conflict in various parts of the world, such as the Persian (Arabian) Gulf, Korean Peninsula, or Taiwan Strait. In addition, unconventional threats in the maritime domain have dramatically increased in diversity and intensity since the early 1990s. They include transnational terrorism and criminal networks involved in illicit trafficking in narcotics, humans, and weapons. Piracy is a growing problem in some parts of the world, particularly in Southeast Asia and off the east and west coasts of Africa. The combination of transnational terrorism and piracy can seriously disrupt the flow of inter-

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U.S. Navy (Justin Lee Losack)

Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group vessels perform multiship maneuvers in Atlantic

national commerce. The potential impact of such threats on world peace and the global economy is enormous.² There is also a growing danger to ports/bases and coastal facilities/installations from ballistic missiles fired by a rogue state or even transnational terrorist groups.

The threat to port security has increased significantly in the past few decades due to the proliferation of platforms and weapons that can be used against ships and port facilities/installations. Uninterrupted maritime trade is one of the most critical factors for the prosperity of nations. The problem of security against terrorist attack is especially acute at ports located near strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Gibraltar, Suez Canal, and Panama Canal. Large ports are especially vulnerable to various hostile acts because of the difficulties in providing full, around-the-clock protection. Currently, the greatest threat to the security of major ports is from terrorists, operating individually or in groups.

Responsibilities

Navies can be employed in routine activities in peacetime, operations short of war, low-intensity conflict, and high-intensity conventional war (see table). Today and for the immediate future, naval forces will be predominantly employed in carrying out multiple and diverse tasks in what are arbitrarily called operations short of (regional) war. However, a navy, no matter how strong, cannot carry out all the tasks alone but needs to proceed in combination with other elements of naval power, such as a coast guard. In some cases, the coast guard is an integral part of the navy; in other cases, the two are separate. Optimally, a coast guard should be used primarily for maritime policing (or constabulary) duties in peacetime and for carrying out some combat missions in operations short of war and in a high-intensity conventional conflict. In the littorals, the air force and army might be employed jointly with naval forces.

A navy also has to interact and work closely with other elements of the country's sea power—specifically, the merchant marine, shipbuilding industries, ocean technology enterprises, and deep-sea mining agencies. Additionally, navies need to cooperate closely with many government agencies. This, in turn, requires smooth and effective interagency cooperation.

Additionally, naval forces and coast guards need to work with a large number of nongovernmental organizations and private volunteer organizations ashore.

Operations in Peacetime

Operations in time of peace encompass routine activities, homeland security, protection of the country's economic interests at sea, enforcement of maritime treaties, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. In general, routine duties include maritime border laws/customs enforcement, hydrographic surveys, oceanographic research, salvage, search and rescue, ordnance disposal, and marine pollution control. For the most part, these tasks are the responsibility of the coast guard, with naval forces employed in a supporting role.

The threats to homeland security from across the sea are increasing in both intensity and sophistication. Specifically, these threats include ballistic missiles, maritime terrorism, illicit fishing, cross-border illegal immigration, criminal activity in ports/harbors and at critical installations/facilities ashore, piracy, and trafficking in narcotics, humans, and weapons.

The threat of ballistic missiles against ports/airfields and coastal installations/facilities can be countered by creating seabased ballistic missile defense (BMD) systems, as the U.S. Navy is doing. BMD systems detect and destroy enemy aircraft and missiles by physically and electronically attacking bases, launch sites, and associated command and control systems. As part of homeland security, they are intended to provide defense against ballistic missiles in the terminal phase of their flight.³

Maritime terrorism has emerged as a formidable threat to both civilian and naval vessels. Large commercial ships are easy targets for determined terrorists, and the value of these vessels and cargoes makes them attractive to both regional terrorist groups and international organizations that desire to disrupt the economic lifelines of the industrial world. Compounding the threat is the use of commercial vessels by criminals who are often allied with terrorists. There is also a possibility that weapons of mass destruction (WMD) could be used as terrorist weapons.

Protection of ports encompasses a series of related actions and measures regarding safety of incoming ships and their cargo

during transit on the high seas, through the 200-nautical-mile (nm) EEZ, in the territorial sea (usually the 12-nm zone offshore), and in ports and their approaches. Hence, in a physical sense, three zones of maritime security exist: the international zone (foreign countries, high seas), the border/coastal zone (territorial sea plus EEZ), and the domestic zone (territorial sea plus ports and their approaches). International law fully applies in the international zone, while the country's jurisdiction is exercised over all vessels, facilities, and port security in the domestic and border/coastal zones.

Coast guards are largely responsible for protection of their countries' EEZs. This broad task includes monitoring and surveillance of the fisheries, maritime safety, marine pollution reporting, and protection of marine mineral deposits and gas/oil deposits and installations. The navies are primarily responsible for protecting friendly commercial shipping outside of the EEZ.

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A state or territory ruled or controlled by a radical regime and situated close to maritime trade chokepoints might attempt to harass shipping, requiring the response of naval forces. Protection of shipping requires coordinated employment of surface, air, and subsurface forces, as well as a suitable command organization both ashore and afloat. In general, protection of shipping should envisage preemptive or retaliatory strikes or raids against selected targets at sea or ashore. A major operation in *protection of shipping* would require the execution of a variety of tasks to protect merchant vessels from unlawful attack in international waters. This broad task can be accomplished through, among other things, the escort of merchant ships (sometimes of individual ships, for a specific purpose), coastal sea control, harbor defense, and mine countermeasure ships.

Blue water navies such as the U.S. Navy are sometimes involved in disputes with riparian states regarding the rights of innocent passage through international straits,

Table. Spectrum of Conflict at Sea

PEACETIME	OPERATIONS SHORT OF WAR	LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT	HIGH-INTENSITY CONVENTIONAL CONFLICT
<p>Routine Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Enforcing maritime border laws and customs ■ Vessel traffic service ■ Search and rescue ■ Salvage ■ Ordnance disposal ■ Hydrographic survey ■ Oceanographic research <p>Homeland Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ballistic missile defense ■ Combating terrorism ■ Port security ■ Protecting critical installations/facilities on the coast ■ Counternarcotics (drugs) ■ Intercepting illegal immigration ■ Countering weapons smuggling ■ Combating piracy ■ Countering environmental pollution <p>Protection of the Country's Economic Interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Protecting commercial shipping ■ Protecting fisheries ■ Protecting offshore oil/gas installations ■ Protecting seabed mineral deposits ■ Combating piracy <p>Enforcement of International Maritime Treaties and United Nations Resolutions on Combating Transnational Terrorism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction ■ Ensuring freedom of navigation/overflight ■ Intercepting illicit arms trade ■ Combating piracy ■ Eliminating human trafficking <p>Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assistance in the aftermath of natural disasters ■ Emergency medical assistance ■ Goodwill activities ■ Refugee assistance ■ Civilian evacuation 	<p>Support of Foreign Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Coercive diplomacy ■ Naval diplomacy ■ Crisis prevention/management ■ Maritime border disputes <p>Support of Military (Theater) Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nuclear deterrence ■ Conventional deterrence ■ Ballistic missile defense ■ Security cooperation <p>Support of Peace Operations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Peacekeeping operations ■ Peace enforcement operations ■ Expanded peacekeeping operations/peace enforcement operations 	<p>Support of Insurgency Campaign</p> <p>Support of Counterinsurgency Campaign</p> <p>Support of Counterterrorism Campaign</p>	<p>Regional War</p> <p>Global War</p>



Navy MH-60S Seahawk performs channel guard duty as amphibious assault ship USS Essex transits San Bernardino Straits in Philippines

U.S. Navy (Michael D. Kennedy)

or in contesting these states' excessive claims regarding the extent of territorial waters. This requires the use of naval forces to ensure *freedom of navigation and overflight*. Normally, a riparian state may exercise jurisdiction and control within its territorial seas; international law, however, establishes the right of innocent passage of ships of other

nations through a state's territorial waters. Passage is considered *innocent* as long as it is not prejudicial to the peace, good order, or security of the coastal nation. In addition, freedom of navigation through international airspace for aircraft is a well-established principle of international law. Threats to aircraft through extension of airspace control

zones beyond international norms, whether by nations or groups, can be expected to result in use of force acceptable under international law to rectify the situation.

Navies are currently extensively employed in enforcing international treaties that prohibit illicit trafficking in weapons and humans. Smuggling and trafficking in

humans have increased worldwide in recent years. The problem is exacerbated by the ever increasing involvement of criminal gangs in such trade. Among other things, the smuggling of migrants by organized crime groups disrupts the established immigration policies of destination countries. It also involves human rights abuses; such trafficking is slavery in all but name. If a ship is engaged in this activity, it loses its right of innocent passage. In December 2000, the United Nations (UN) convention against organized crime was also related to the protocol to prevent, suppress, and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children. This protocol generally justifies interdiction of commercial vessels on countertrafficking grounds. It also encourages information-sharing, interdiction training, and the development of tighter legislative authority to interdict and enforce documentary requirements on shipping.⁴

Piracy has posed a threat to all nations for as long as people have sailed the oceans. The international community has branded piracy as hostile to the human race and treats it as one of the few crimes over which universal jurisdiction applies. Piracy is punishable by all nations wherever the perpetrators are found and without regard to where the offense occurred. It remains a serious threat to international commerce

and safety and is on the increase in many parts of the world, but particularly in the waters of Southeast Asia and Africa. In Southeast Asia, commercial ships are especially vulnerable to piracy due to narrow waterways and countless small islands.

Navies are often involved in nonmilitary actions, such as providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and engaging in goodwill activities. The first broad task includes such actions as emergency medical assistance, large-scale evacuation of civilian populations, noncombatant evacuation, and refugee assistance. Emergency medical assistance often includes transporting civilians in need of medical help from or to relatively remote locations.

Operations Short of War

In one definition, *operations short of war* are described as the use or threatened use of military capabilities in combination with other sources of national power across the spectrum of conflict. These operations include the threats of use or actual use of military forces in support of foreign policy and military (and/or theater) strategy, peace operations, and security cooperation.

The principal methods of combat employment of naval forces in operations short of war are major and minor tactical actions. Major naval operations are planned

and conducted only in exceptional circumstances. One's naval forces are largely employed as part of the sea and/or air exclusion zone and maritime intercept operations (MIOs). *Exclusion zones* can be established in the air, at sea, or on land to prevent the transit of oil or other cargo and weapons. An exclusion zone is usually imposed by the United Nations or some other international body, but it may also be established by individual countries. Exclusion zones can be authorized by UN Security Council resolution and offer a means of simplifying sea control through the promulgation of an intention to maintain sea denial to cover a specific area. In diplomatic terms, they are a way of enhancing coercive action by declaring a resolve to use combat if necessary. To be credible, they must be enforceable, and the rights and security of third parties need to be ensured. *Maritime intercept operations* are usually conducted as part of the enforcement of sanctions by an international body such as the UN or some regional body. The political objective is usually to compel a country or group of countries to conform to the demands of the initiating body. They include coercive measures aimed to interdict the movement of designated items into or out of a nation or a specific sea area. MIOs can also be applied by a major naval power or group of powers to prevent maritime terrorism or

Sailors conduct security sweeps in Persian Gulf



U.S. Navy (Kirk Worley)

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illicit trafficking in narcotics, humans, and weapons. Normally, these operations require the employment of both surface and air forces.⁵ For example, UN-mandated MIOs were conducted against Iraq by the U.S. Navy and its coalition partners between August 1990 and March 1993.

Naval forces can be employed in support of foreign policy, military (theater) strategy, and peace operations. Navies are an ideal tool for providing *support of foreign policy*. Their main advantages are flexibility, mobility, and political symbolism. Naval forces have diverse capabilities that can be quickly tailored to the situation at hand. They are also largely self-sufficient and do

not require extensive land support. Naval forces can be employed in support of the country's diplomatic initiatives in peacetime and time of crisis, or for naval diplomacy—actions aimed to create a favorable general and military image abroad, establish one's rights in areas of interest, reassure allies and other friendly countries, influence the behavior of other governments, threaten seaborne interdiction, and, finally, threaten the use of lethal force. Deployment of naval forces during times of tension or crisis to back up diplomacy and thereby pose an unstated but clear threat is an example of naval diplomacy, which can also help in coalition-building.

Navies are generally much more effective than armies or air forces in terms of their international acceptability and capacity to make the desired impact. They can be used symbolically to send a message to a specific government. When a stronger message is required, naval diplomacy can take the form of employment of carefully tailored forces with a credible offensive capability, signaling that a much more capable force will follow, or it can give encouragement to a friendly country by providing reinforcement. The threat of the use of limited offensive action or

coercion might be designed to deter a possible aggressor or to compel him to comply with a diplomatic demarche or resolution.

Naval forces can be used in conflict prevention, coercive diplomacy, and peace operations. *Conflict prevention* includes diverse military activities conducted either unilaterally or collectively under Chapter VI of the UN Charter and aimed at either preventing escalation of disputes into armed conflict or facilitating resolution of armed violence. These actions range from diplomatic initiatives to preventive deployment of naval forces. The main purpose of the forward presence of U.S. naval forces in the western Pacific, Arabian Sea, Persian (Arabian) Gulf, and Mediterranean is to prevent the outbreak of large-scale hostilities that might affect the national interests of the United States and its allies or friends. Naval forces deployed in forward areas should be of sufficient size and combat power to defeat opposing forces quickly and decisively.

Under the UN Charter, conflict prevention should be conducted with strict impartiality because all sides in a dispute have to agree to involve other countries as mediators. Naval forces can be deployed in the proximity of a country where hostilities

threaten to break out. Aircraft carrier groups and amphibious task forces in particular have a greater chance of success in disputes among nation-states than in ethnic conflict or civil war. To be effective, such a deployment should be accompanied by a clear willingness on the part of the international community to use overwhelming force if necessary. Otherwise, the preventive deployment of naval forces, regardless of size and capability, will rarely produce the desired effect.

Naval forces are one of the most effective and flexible tools in applying *coercive diplomacy* (popularly called *gunboat diplomacy*), which is the use or threat of limited naval force aimed at securing advantage or averting loss, either in furtherance of an international dispute or against foreign nationals within the territory or jurisdiction of their own state. Coercive diplomacy is conducted both in peacetime and during operations short of war. Methods used are “show the flag,” retaliatory raids, rescue operations, or direct attack to achieve a specific military objective. Visits of warships to foreign ports are one of the most common methods of showing the flag. The aim of such visits can range from demonstrating continuing interest in the area to showing resolve in support of a friendly state against threats by a neighboring state. The ships then act as ambassadors. Normally, the main purpose of such visits is to make a favorable impression on the local populace. The degree to which a show of force can be introduced depends on the political message to be communicated. Sometimes it can be carried out as a warning to leaders or hostile states. At other times, a show of force by ships can act as a sign of reassurance and a token of support.

For example, the United States sent a powerful signal of support to Turkey and Greece by sending the battleship USS *Missouri* (BB-63) for a visit to Istanbul and Piraeus in April 1946. This was followed by a visit of the aircraft carrier USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt* (CVB-42) to Greece in September of the same year. Both countries were under enormous pressure from the aggressive policies of Moscow. The Soviets strongly supported the Greek communists in their civil war and issued demands to Turkey to grant a naval base in the Dodecanese Islands and joint control of the Turkish Straits.⁶

However, in some cases, a show of force has failed to achieve its intended objectives. For example, the employment

deployment of naval forces to pose an unstated but clear threat is an example of naval diplomacy



U.S. Marine Corps (Luis P. Valdespino, Jr.)

of three U.S. aircraft carriers in the Sea of Japan after the intelligence ship USS *Pueblo* (AGER-2) with its 83 crew members was captured off Wonsan in January 1968 apparently did not offer a great advantage to the United States in subsequent negotiations.⁷ In March 1996, the Chinese carried out extensive missile firings and exercises off the coast of Taiwan. However, that show of force only hardened the Taiwanese posture and forced the United States to move its naval forces in the Taiwan Strait.

Naval forces are most extensively used in support of *peace operations*, which are military operations to support diplomatic

operations, peace-enforcement operations do not require the consent of the warring factions involved in a conflict. When used for peace enforcement, naval forces should have at least limited power projection capabilities and be ready to engage in combat.

Naval forces may also be involved in *expanded peacekeeping and peace-enforcement operations*. These operations are larger than peacekeeping operations and can involve over 20,000 personnel. The consent of the sides in the conflict is usually nominal, incomplete, or nonexistent. These operations include more assertive mandates and rules of

engagement, including the use of force under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter.⁸ Expanded peacekeeping/peace-enforcement operations are conducted with strictly limited objectives, such as protecting safe-flight or no-fly zones or relief deliveries. If too intrusive, the operations are likely to draw multinational forces into open hostilities; the naval forces would then have to be either pulled out or committed to full-scale combat.⁹

Blue water navies play a critical role in providing *support to national and military (or theater) strategy* as a part of nuclear and/or conventional deterrence. Credible nuclear

the tasks of peace enforcement include implementation of sanctions, establishment and supervision of exclusion zones, intervention to restore order, and forcible separation of belligerents

efforts to reach a long-term political settlement. These actions are conducted in conjunction with diplomacy as necessary to negotiate a truce and resolve a conflict. They may be initiated in support of diplomatic activities before, during, or after the conflict. Peacekeeping and peace enforcement are the principal types of peace operations.

Peacekeeping operations are designed to contain, moderate, or terminate hostilities between or within states, using international or impartial military forces and civilians to complement political conflict-resolution efforts and restore and maintain peace. These actions take place after the sides in a conflict agree to cease hostilities; impartial observers are normally sent to verify the implementation of the ceasefire or to monitor the separation of forces.

Peace-enforcement operations involve diverse tasks as authorized by Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The objective is to compel compliance with resolutions or sanctions that have been adopted to maintain or restore peace or order. The tasks of peace enforcement include implementation of sanctions, establishment and supervision of exclusion zones, intervention to restore order, and forcible separation of belligerents. The aim is to establish an environment for a truce or ceasefire. In contrast to peacekeeping



Arleigh Burke-class destroyer USS *Decatur* launches SM-3 missile during ballistic missile flight test in Pacific

U.S. Navy

deterrence is based on adequate capability and the certitude that one nation can and will inflict unacceptable losses on an enemy who uses nuclear weapons first. Nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) are the most survivable component of the country's nuclear forces triad. During the Cold War, these submarines conducted extensive patrols in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, in readiness to fire their sea-launched ballistic missiles. Seabased nuclear deterrent forces continue to have an important role in the nuclear deterrence posture of the United States, the Russian Federation, Britain, France, and the People's Republic of China.

The use or threatened use of conventional forces is a critical element in conventional deterrence. Naval forces are highly suitable for conventional deterrence because of their high mobility and combat power. For a blue water navy, the main method of exercising conventional deterrence is the forward deployment of its striking forces. Among other things, forward deployed forces can considerably enhance a nation's influence and prestige in a given sea area. Presence can greatly help coalition-building, enhance stability, and deter hostile actions against one's interests. It also provides an initial crisis-response capability.

Routine forward presence includes permanently based naval forces overseas and periodic deployment of naval forces in the case of crises, port visits, and participation in bilateral and multilateral training exercises. For example, deployment of powerful U.S. carrier strike groups and expeditionary strike groups in a certain region, such as the eastern Mediterranean or western Pacific, can send a powerful signal to enemies and friends alike in a crisis. It could prevent the outbreak of conflict, shape the security environment, and serve as a basis for regional peace and stability.

The ability to deploy seabased air and missile defenses forward contributes to force self-protection, assured access, and the defense of other forward deployed forces. Forward deployed U.S. naval forces can provide protection against air and missile threats over a large area of a given maritime theater. Also, by engaging enemy ballistic missiles in the boost and midcourse stages of flight, homeland security is greatly enhanced.

Forward naval presence also creates prerequisites for obtaining and then maintaining sea control in certain parts of a maritime theater. A blue water navy should

deploy sufficiently strong and combat-ready forces in the area of potential conflict. These forces should be concentrated in such numbers as to be capable of quickly achieving superiority over the potential opponent at sea. A coastal navy or a major navy operating within the confines of a narrow sea normally cannot obtain sea control without naval forces operating from a secure base of operations. In practical terms, this means that the degree of basing/deployment area control must ensure full protection of forces from all types of threats.

Navies are extensively used in carrying out diverse tasks as part of *security cooperation* in a given maritime theater. Security cooperation in general is aimed to build defense relationships with international partners, promote cultural awareness and

regional understanding, and enhance strategic access. Cooperative activities include assisting host nations in freeing or protecting their societies from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency; assisting in training; combating illegal activities along their coastlines; and protecting economic infrastructure.¹⁰

Low-intensity Conflict

Navies can be employed to carry out diverse tasks in support of an insurgency or counterinsurgency. Duties include blockading the coast to prevent an influx of fighters and material to the insurgents; attacking insurgent concentrations in their operating areas or sanctuaries by using surface combatants and carrier-based aircraft; providing gunfire support to friendly troops ashore; and providing close air support, transport of friendly



Fleet Surgical Team from USS *Tarawa* conducts humanitarian assistance operations in Bangladesh after Tropical Cyclone Sidr

U.S. Navy (Daniel A. Barker)

troops and material, and reconnaissance/surveillance. For example, from 1965 to 1970, the U.S. Navy conducted a blockade of South Vietnam's 1,200-mile coastline in an effort to stop fighters and supplies from flowing by sea from North Vietnam to South Vietnam (Operation *Market Time*). As part of that effort, Operation *Sea Dragon* aimed to intercept and destroy the Vietcong's waterborne logistics craft. The Navy's riverine forces conducted Operations *Game Warden* and *Sea Lord*.

More recently, naval forces were extensively employed in conducting military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions to defeat insurgencies in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Colombia. For example, the U.S. Navy's special operations forces, operating from an aircraft carrier, and two Marine Expeditionary Units (Special Operations Capable), operating from amphibious ships, conducted a forcible entry deep into Afghan territory to open access for the joint force.¹¹

High-intensity Conventional Conflict

Navies will play a major role in providing direct and/or indirect support to ground forces in the case of a regional or global conflict. War at sea has almost never taken place alone but has been conducted in conjunction with war on land and, in the modern era, in the air. The objectives of naval warfare have been an integral part of war's objectives. These, in turn, are accomplished by the employment of all the services of a country's armed forces. In contrast to war on land, the objectives in war at sea are almost generally physical in character. The main strategic or operational objective for a stronger side is to obtain sea control in the whole theater or a major part of it, while the weaker side tries to achieve sea denial. A relatively strong but initially weaker side at sea aims to obtain sea control for itself. When operating in an enclosed sea theater, a blue water navy would try to obtain chokepoint control, while the weaker side would conduct counter-chokepoint control. Another operational objective for both the stronger and weaker sides at sea is to establish, maintain, and, if possible, expand control of their respective basing and deployment areas for their naval forces and aircraft, thereby creating prerequisites for planning, preparing, and executing major operations.

Sea control essentially means the ability of a force to operate with a high degree of freedom in an ocean area, but often for a limited time. In strategic terms, obtaining

or losing sea control on the open ocean would normally have an indirect effect on the war situation on land. This effect is far more direct and immediate in enclosed or marginal seas, where in many cases the loss of sea control can lead to the collapse of one's front on land and thereby considerably affect the outcome of the war. The opposite is also true: obtaining or losing sea control in a marginal sea or enclosed seas is considerably influenced by the course of events in the war on land.¹² In contrast to the open ocean, sea control in a typical narrow sea usually cannot be obtained and then maintained without the closest cooperation among all

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the services. Even when the navy is the principal force, it should be directly or indirectly supported by the other services. Very often, naval forces would have a relatively higher degree of independence in carrying out tasks to obtain sea control.¹³

Sea control is inextricably linked with armed struggle at sea. In other words, one

does not possess control of the sea by virtue of having forces deployed in the proximity of the area of potential conflict or crisis in peacetime. In peacetime, any navy, regardless of its size or combat strength, has almost unlimited access to any sea area. Forward presence is conducted with full respect for international treaties and conventions and without violating the territorial waters of other countries. Yet this does not in any way preclude starting the struggle for sea control in peacetime because preconditions must be created to quickly attain sea control after the start of hostilities.¹⁴

By obtaining sea control, the stronger side would create favorable conditions for carrying out other important tasks at sea. Among other things, sea control would permit the navy to project power on the opposite shore in the littorals or far from the home territory; carry out diverse tasks in support of a friendly army operating on the coast; pose a threat of, and carry out, amphibious assault on the enemy shore; weaken military-economic potential through attack on the enemy's maritime trade; and protect friendly maritime trade.

In general, sea control and disputed (or contested) sea control can be strategic, operational, and tactical in scale. *Strategic sea control* pertains to the entire maritime



U.S. Navy

Sailors aid crew of Taiwanese-flagged fishing trawler in Indian Ocean after its release by pirates

Guided missile submarine USS *Ohio* arrives in Guam during maiden voyage

U.S. Navy (Jacob Sippel)

theater, while control of a major part of a maritime theater represents *operational sea control*. *Tactical control* refers to control of a maritime combat sector or zone but sometimes can encompass a maritime area of operations. However, in practical terms, the focus should invariably be on *strategic* or *operational* sea control or disputed control, not tactical sea control.

In general, sea control can encompass control of the surface, subsurface, and airspace or of any combination of these three physical media. In the era of sail, command of the sea was limited to command of the surface. After the advent of the submarine and aircraft, the two other dimensions emerged. The degree of overall control of a given sea area depends on the degree of control of each of the three dimensions.¹⁵ However, experience shows that, during war between two strong opponents at sea, it is not possible to obtain or maintain control of all three physical media to the same degree or for extended times.

Because of the rather large differences in the size of the physical environment and the proximity of the continental landmass, there is a considerable difference between obtaining sea control on the open ocean and in the littorals. Obtaining sea control in the littorals is highly dependent on the ability to obtain air superiority. Because of the ever-increasing range, endurance, and speed of modern aircraft, ever-larger ocean areas are becoming the areas of employment for both naval forces and land-based aircraft. Today, no part of the littoral is beyond the

reach of land-based attack aircraft. Land- or carrier-based aircraft play an extraordinary role in obtaining sea control in the littorals. Without air superiority, sea control simply cannot be obtained. Depending on capabilities, naval forces can take part in the struggle for air superiority. Yet they are not the main means of accomplishing that objective, especially in the sea areas within effective range of land-based aircraft. If one side at sea possesses air superiority, it can be very difficult for the other side to use some aspects of sea control for its own purposes. Air superiority over a given ocean area can compensate for those aspects of sea control that naval forces failed to obtain. Nevertheless, for all its value, air superiority cannot *replace* control of the surface and subsurface.¹⁶

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In general, sea control cannot be expressed in quantitative terms or various metrics (as the U.S. Navy is trying to do); it can be recognized only in its effects. Sea control is always relative in spatial terms. It pertains to the specific part of the theater in which a certain degree of control must be obtained. Sea control is also relative in terms of the factor of time. It is also relative in terms of the factor of force. The relatively strong

enemy always has the ability to dispute the sea control obtained by the stronger side.¹⁷

Disputed (or contested) sea control is usually the principal objective of a weaker but relatively strong navy in the initial phase of a war at sea. When command is in dispute, the general conditions might give a stable or unstable equilibrium. Then the power of neither side preponderates to any appreciable extent. It may also be that the command lies with the opponent.¹⁸ The objective then can be strategic, encompassing the entire theater, or operational, when control is disputed in a major part of the theater.

Disputed sea control exists when the opposing sides possess roughly equal capabilities and opportunities to obtain sea control in a theater as a whole (or in one of its parts) and there is neither significant change in the ratio of forces nor a change of the initiative to either side.¹⁹ Once disputed control is obtained, the initially weaker side can possibly try to obtain sea control of its own. Denying the use of the sea to an opponent has often been regarded as the opposite of sea control, but this is an oversimplification. If a weaker side denies control of the sea to a stronger opponent, this does not mean that it necessarily obtains control itself.²⁰ Sea control and sea denial are often complementary objectives. For example, sea denial may be conducted to help secure use of the sea, either in the same geographical area or elsewhere. A fleet operating in one or more enclosed or marginal seas might opt for, or be forced by circumstances to accomplish, a combination of objectives—general sea control in the enclosed sea theater, and contested control in a semi-enclosed sea or parts of the adjacent oceans.

Disputed sea control often occurs in the initial phase of a war and is characterized by an almost-continuous struggle for control of certain ocean areas. Once control is obtained, however, it is usually not maintained for a long period, but may be lost from time to time and then regained. In coastal or offshore waters, sea control by a stronger fleet can be disputed even if the major part of a weaker fleet is destroyed.

When control is in dispute, both sides usually operate at high risk because their strength is approximately in balance. One side usually controls one or more parts of a given theater, while its opponent controls the remaining part. Each side's control of a specific sea area is usually limited in time. In

the littorals, however, contesting sea control is primarily carried out by submarines, small surface combatants, coastal missile/gun batteries, land-based aircraft, and mines.

In general, naval forces can carry out operations aimed to secure control of the sea areas, operations in areas not under command, and operations in the sea areas under command.²¹ Obtaining, maintaining, and exercising sea control are related but not identical terms; they differ in time and the efforts of naval forces. Sea control is *obtained* primarily by the employment of maritime forces in the form of major naval operations. In the littorals, these operations will be joint or combined—that is, not only naval forces but also combat arms/branches of other services will take part. The result of sea control should be that forces can carry out the main tasks without significant interference from the opponent. After sea control is obtained, it must be *maintained*. In operational terms, this phase equates to *consolidation of strategic or operational success*. The degree of sea control to be obtained and maintained should determine the main tasks assigned to one's naval forces. *Exercising sea control* is carried out through a series of operational tasks aimed to *exploit strategic or operational success*. The successful execution of operational tasks should expand and reinforce the degree of sea control obtained in a certain sea or ocean area in terms of time and space.

The struggle for control of chokepoints is a unique feature of war for control of a typical narrow sea. Straits often serve as the main highways for large-scale invasions. Control of a strait/narrows or several straits can cut off or isolate enemy forces in an adjacent theater of war. The loss of control of an important strait or narrows on whose shores a land campaign is in progress is often fraught with danger for fleet forces. For a blue water navy, general sea control is hardly possible without establishing not only control on the open ocean but also direct or indirect control of several critical passages of vital importance to the world's maritime trade, or by obtaining control of a given enclosed or semienclosed sea theater. The objective for a weaker side, then, is just the opposite: *chokepoint control denial*. In either case, but particularly for a weaker side, this objective would normally require the highest degree of cooperation among naval forces and the combat arms of other services.

One of the most important tasks of any navy is to obtain and maintain *basing/deployment area control*. Without securing control of a basing and deployment area first, it is difficult if not impossible to prepare and execute major naval operations or naval tactical operations. This objective is especially critical for naval forces operating in an enclosed or semienclosed sea. It is intended to obtain a sufficient degree of security for traffic in coastal waters and road/railroad traffic on the coast.²²

Optimally, control of basing and deployment areas should be established and maintained in peacetime. The extent of that control is limited only by the maritime interests of other countries. Control of basing and deployment areas must then be maintained in wartime. The physical scope of this control depends on the degree of sea control obtained in a given sea or ocean area. Without sea control, one cannot maintain control of basing and deployment areas. At the same time, actions to obtain sea control are far easier if forces operate from secure basing and deployment areas. This, of course, does not preclude obtaining sea control in an area where control of basing and deployment areas does not exist. This is especially true in the operations of naval forces in enemy-controlled sea areas. Then the basing and deployment area is gradually extended by establishing new bases and facilities on the conquered territories.²³

As in the past, naval power will continue to play a critical and perhaps vital role in protecting and preserving a nation's interests at sea. This will especially be the case for countries such as the United States, Great Britain, Japan, the People's Republic of China, and others whose prosperity and economic well-being depend on the free and uninterrupted use of the sea. Naval power is undoubtedly a powerful tool in support of foreign policy, military or theater strategy, and various peace operations. It is an integral part of homeland security. In concert with other sources of the country's military and nonmilitary power, naval power has a large role in deterring the outbreak of large-scale hostilities. Finally, in the case of a regional or global conflict, forces on land cannot ultimately succeed without secure use of the sea. Obtaining, maintaining, and exercising control of the oceans are tasks that cannot be accomplished without a strong and effective naval power. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Specifically, a *sea power* encompasses naval power plus all the nonmilitary aspects of the use of the sea, particularly merchant marine, ports/harbors, fisheries, shipyards/ship repair facilities and all maritime-related industries, oil/gas exploration, and marine-related scientific research (for example, oceanographic research, hydrographic survey, and marine biology).

² Department of the Navy, *Naval Operations Concept 2006* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006), 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴ Michael Knights, "Maritime Interdiction in the Gulf: Developing a Culture of Focused Interdiction Using Existing International Conventions," Nonproliferation Education Policy Center, February 7, 2006, 23.

⁵ Cited in Michael Boyce et al., *Maritime Forces in Peace & War: Joint & Combined Operations*, Bailrigg Paper 30 (Lancaster, UK: Centre for Defence and International Security Studies, 1999), 26.

⁶ Ivan Tibor Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe 1944–1993: Detour from the Periphery to the Periphery* (Toronto: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 34; Jonathan Knight, "American Statecraft and the 1946 Black Sea Straits Controversy," *Political Science Quarterly* 90, no. 3 (Autumn 1975), 451.

⁷ Richard A. Mobley, *Flash Point North Korea: The Pueblo and EC-121 Crisis* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2003), 117–118.

⁸ Hans Binnendijk, ed., *Strategic Assessment 1996: Instruments of U.S. Power* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1996), 135.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁰ Department of the Navy, 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 13, 20.

¹² Guenther Poeschel, "Ueber die Seeherrschaft (I)," *Militaerwesen* (East Berlin) 5 (May 1982), 41.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 41, 45.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁸ Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (London: Longmans, Green, 1918), 91.

¹⁹ Guenther Poeschel, "Ueber die Seeherrschaft (II)," *Militaerwesen* (East Berlin) 6 (June 1982), 71.

²⁰ B. Mitchell Simpson III, *The Development of Naval Thought: Essays by Herbert Rosinski* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1977), xix.

²¹ R.K. Turner, "Background of Naval Strategy," lecture delivered before the Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, VA, February 16, 1938, 8.

²² Petar Zonja, "Odrzavanje povoljnog operativnog rezima u malim morima," *Mornaricki Glasnik* (Belgrade) 1 (January-February 1972), 33.

²³ Poeschel, "Ueber die Seeherrschaft (II)," 74.