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## In My View

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## IN MY VIEW

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### WAVE OF THE FUTURE: THE NAVY SHOULD DO MORE NOW TO CONFRONT THREATS JUST OVER THE HORIZON

Sir:

Try to visualize the global innovations that could emerge within the next thirty years to challenge the U.S. Navy's dominance: Stealthier, autonomous ballistic-missile submarines (Bryan Ericsson, "Drone Boomers: How Satellite Detection and the Push for Autonomy May Lead to Unmanned SSBNs," *International Affairs Review* [29 March 2016]). City-sized aircraft carriers capable of deploying swarms of miniature armed drones for precision-strike combat missions (Denise Chow, "US Navy's New Aircraft Carriers Will Be Massive 'Floating Cities,'" *Live Science* [18 October 2013]). Hydrogen-powered, blue-water sloops brandishing directed-energy projectiles (Naval Research Laboratory, "Scale Model WWII Craft Takes Flight with Fuel from the Sea Concept," news release, 7 April 2014). Underwater robots specializing in naval mine removal and undersea warfare ("Future US Navy: Robotic Sub-Hunters, Deepsea Pods," *Daily Mail*, 28 March 2015).

Ostensibly, the Department of Defense (DoD) is on top of it. It has created plans to introduce autonomous vehicles, rail guns, and a host of other advanced systems into the Navy's arsenal to maintain its competitive edge. After all, the Navy is the best funded of all the services. It is forward deployed and constantly under way. For the past several years, its readiness has been unrivaled by that of the navies of other world powers.

Yet the Pentagon has failed to consider another crucial factor when forging its future budget and planning cycles: a more complex geopolitical environment emerging in tandem with these technological advances. During this thirty-year time frame, the international security environment will change dramatically. The U.S. National Intelligence Council (NIC) assessed in 2012 that by 2030 power will have shifted to "networks and coalitions in a multipolar world" (National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds* [December 2012]). Balances of power will shift and expand, much to the detriment of U.S. interests.

Washington's overseas influence will wane and other countries' will fill the vacuum. Power—and with it individual access to technologically advanced naval platforms and conventional weapons—will disperse across the world.

This will compound the Navy's difficulties in achieving its mission. It is not simply a matter of the great advancement in weapons, autonomous systems, and platforms themselves; who has access to which ones and the total to which they have access are also of utmost concern. Pentagon policy makers, congressional leaders, and other decision makers in the U.S. government must recognize how the confluence of these two developments—an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape and the profusion of more-capable weapons dispersed across it—threatens U.S. interests.

Navy and DoD leadership can begin to address the problem in two ways. First, naval planners must concoct longer-term and more-specific plans. Unlike current planning evolutions, defense planners should begin anticipating strategic surprise beyond twenty-year windows. Just after that time window is when the threat might grow out of proportion to the Navy's ability to counter it. Of course, longer-term planning runs the risk of misapplying critical resources. The mid-twenty-first century will be highly variable. However, relying on quick-action planning cycles could leave policy makers bewildered and the Navy trailing far behind its strategic rivals.

Second, the Navy, already hamstrung by budget, should avoid planning on the basis of political considerations. Despite an \$848 million deficit on the Navy's current operations and maintenance accounts, Congress is driving investments in larger, more-powerful naval ships (Christopher P. Cavas, "US Navy Faces \$848 Million Ops & Maintenance Shortfall," *Defense News*, 26 May 2016). But future naval wars will not be fought on the high seas. They will be fought in the Strait of Hormuz and the South China Sea, where technological mastery, autonomy, willpower, and the ability to counter asymmetric swarm attacks will be pivotal to victory at sea (Caitlin Talmadge, "Closing Time: Assessing the Iranian Threat to the Strait of Hormuz," *International Security* 33, no. 1 [Summer 2008]). These wars will be fought in archipelagoes, choke points, and the most isolated regions on earth, where the enemy can use asymmetric warfare, mosaic defense, and terrain to his advantage.

No doubt, the world is a complex place even today. Terrorism, Russia, China, and Iran pose enduring, direct threats to the Navy. But the increase in complexity will not abate. Planners must account for these evolutions in international security before it is too late.

## A QUESTION OF SERVICE

Sir:

As one of my final duties in the Navy, I was honored to be assigned as chairman of the direct commission boards for Naval Reserve Intelligence Area 19, Washington, DC. Along with two other captains, I interviewed five to ten enlisted and civilian candidates per drill weekend for direct commissions in the Naval Reserve Intelligence Program. This privilege allowed me the opportunity to provide direct input into the makeup of the future generation of reserve intelligence officers and my Navy.

But I found this function also gave me the perspective to reflect on my own time in the Navy as it was coming to an end. Twenty-five-plus years in the Navy, comprising active duty, reserve duty, and recall, had compiled a history for myself that I had not appreciated fully.

All this was brought into focus with one question. I concluded each interview by allowing the candidate ten minutes to ask questions of the board members. With about eighty years of diverse Navy experience among the members of the board, there usually was little we could not answer. Sometimes we learned more about candidates from their questions of us than our questions to them. I know I learned still more about the Navy and my time in it from these questions.

Often we would get the usual, expected questions: about benefits; about what the candidate could expect if selected. Some candidates had a list of questions; one candidate's indexed and tabbed three-ring binder even had a separate tab for questions. Believe it or not, once in a while a candidate had no questions for us.

But I must admit that one petty officer asked the most insightful question of any of the hundreds of candidates I interviewed. Simply, "What was your best day in the Navy; and what was your worst day in the Navy?" I found this question very simple in its presentation but very profound in its complexity. It bypassed all the extraneous issues and drilled directly at the nature of one's service.

I, for one, really had to think about my answer; so, being the coward that I am, I passed the question to one of the other captains to answer first. Then I began to reflect on all the good and bad things that had happened during my Navy service. Although there were a few highlights, I could not pick out any one really good day. There also had been some very exhilarating days that I wish I could relive. And there had been some "thrilling" times that I would not trade for the world—but that I also would never want to go through again. Correspondingly, I could not pick out any one really bad day (among more than a few). There had been some disappointing days, and a few for which I would have liked a "do over."

But, alas, the other two members of the board by now had given their answers and it was my turn. So, it occurred to me that my best day was that on which I reported for duty at Officer Candidate School. I remember coming across the bridge into Newport, Rhode Island, and seeing the “Navy” sign on two blue water towers. I had no idea what I was in for, but that day was the first step in a career that constantly presented challenges that brought out the best in me. I felt as if I belonged there, that I was a member of the team—and I never looked back.

And, at that time, my worst day had not come yet. That was the day on which the Navy said I had to go home. I knew I was a part of something I did not want to give up; but I also knew that some day I would have to look at my Navy service in the rearview mirror. I always felt the Navy would make that decision for me. Well, that day did come. The Navy told me it was time to take off the uniform and hang it in the closet, to leave the service to a younger generation. The day came, as it had for countless others who served before me, and as it will for those who came after me. No more “adventures” to look forward to, no more opportunities to serve, no more friends to be made. Plaques on the wall, knickknacks on the shelf, and trinkets in dust-covered boxes all hold cherished meanings that only you can fondly remember. Memories recall history to us in the form of stories that were, at one time, current events, and whose retelling may start with the words “In my Navy . . .”

But I have found something else. In my interaction with friends and associates, I find that the Navy built within those who served a bond of kinship that the general population lacks. I also have found that our service developed within us the ability to recognize the crux of an issue, rapidly assess available information, make an informed decision, and follow through on that decision. The Navy instilled in us an intangible quality that is not always outwardly apparent but is nevertheless present. We carry a pride of service, but have no reason to flaunt it.

My path never again will cross with that petty officer’s; but if it did, I would thank him for asking the question that brought into focus for me my time in the Navy.

CAPTAIN JOHN DEMAGGIO, USNR (RET.)