Naval War College Review

Volume 65
Number 4 *Autumn*

Article 5

2012

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COMMAND OF THE SEA

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Whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world and consequently the world itself.

SIR WALTER RALEIGH

For in war . . . the common sense of some and the genius of others sees and properly applies means to ends; and naval strategy, like naval tactics, when boiled down, is simply the proper use of means to attain ends. But in peace, as in idleness, such matters drop out of mind, unless systematic provision is made for keeping them in view.

ALFRED THAYER MAHAN

The last great sea battle occurred in 1944. Since then the world ocean has been open to free navigation by all nations as a matter of American policy. The ability to enforce this policy—or perhaps better said, the absence of serious challenges to this policy—has been in significant part a product of the superiority of the U.S. Navy. Despite a latent and partial challenge during the Cold War by the Soviet navy, since World War II the degree and persistence of U.S. Navy superiority have led most people to take it for granted and have caused the old term "command of the sea" virtually to disappear from the naval lexicon.[1] However, the emergence of a powerful Chinese navy and an associated land-based sea-denial force is stimulating a new focus on sea control and overcoming antiaccess/area-denial efforts. New concepts, such as "AirSea Battle," are being developed and investments made in platforms, weapons, and systems. This activity is critical to American strategic interests and prospects, and it must be informed by an understanding of command of the sea as a foundational concept of sea power. A reconsideration of command of the sea is all the more necessary as political, economic, and technological developments have significantly changed the nature of how sea power influences the dynamics of geopolitical interactions. This article will argue for an extended definition of the term and its renewed application to naval strategy and doctrine.

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE TERM

"Command of the sea" denotes a strategic condition, and it is from this actual condition that the logic flows, whatever words are used to describe it. Since ancient times, navies have sought to control communications on the sea. Such control might be general—such as the Romans and British achieved at various times—or it might be local and temporary. In either case the object of such control has been to protect one's own commerce, disrupt the enemy's, move one's own army, and prevent the movement of the enemy's. At various times and places belligerents have built substantial navies to carry out these missions and in the dynamics of their competitions the notion of command of the sea emerged. "Command" denoted a relative strength relationship between two or more navies in which one enjoyed a significant superiority such that the freedom of action of the others to carry out the four basic missions of sea power was constrained and that of the stronger navy enhanced.

By the time the American naval historian and theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan wrote about sea power, international trade as a foundation for a nation's economy had become an inherent element in the concept of command of the sea. Although Mahan did not use the term directly, his notion of "that overbearing power on the sea which drives the enemy's flag from it, or allows it to appear only as a fugitive; and which, by controlling the great common, closes the highways by which commerce moves to and from the enemy's shores" encapsulates the strategic condition in which not only is the enemy's navy unable to interfere with the movements of one's own army but his sea commerce is so constricted as to starve his economy.[2]

Mahan was an advocate of keeping the U.S. battle fleet concentrated in order to counter any European adventurism in the Western Hemisphere.[3] However, this was a tacit admission that the United States of the late nineteenth century did not enjoy command of the sea on a global scale. That belonged to the Royal Navy of Great Britain. Sir Julian Corbett was a British historian who also developed naval theory. In his view, command of the sea, conferred by the defeat or blockade of the enemy's battle fleet, allowed one to disperse one's own naval forces to exercise sea control in specific areas as the need arose.[4] The dispersed fleet could also perform other functions, such as showing the flag and projecting power ashore. Fleet dispersal highlights the other side of the naval strategy coin—sea control. Whereas command of the sea denotes a specific kind of general superiority, "control" is delimited in space and time. Command is associated with capital ships and the main battle fleet; if the enemy cannot challenge one's main battle fleet, then one has some degree of command. Control is usually, but not always, fought for and exercised by smaller, more numerous combatants. This distinction tends to be lost on many who see these terms as synonymous. Command has

been traditionally about the relative strength of fleets, whereas control was and is about the condition of a water space.

The introduction of the submarine and aircraft in the world wars threatened the idea of command of the sea. If the enemy always has the ability to contest control in any area of the sea, whether or not he has a viable battle fleet, there is nothing available to the stronger navy beyond a rather tenuous and local sea control. However, the unconditional surrender and occupation of the Axis powers in 1945 eradicated their air and subsurface threats. The fact that no other viable hostile navy existed at the time gave the navies of the United States and the United Kingdom command of the sea by default. The absolute magnitude of this command added yet another dimension to the concept.

A critical element of this article's argument is the notion that the definition of command of the sea can be extended to peacetime. Those who feel that the concept applies only to wartime tend to base their view on Sir Julian Corbett's assertion that most of the ocean is uncommanded most of the time:

> The object of naval warfare must always be directly or indirectly either to secure command of the sea or to prevent the enemy from securing it.
>
> The second part of the proposition should be noted with special care in order to exclude a habit of thought, which is one of the commonest sources of error in naval speculation. That error is the very general assumption that if one belligerent loses command of the sea that command passes at once to the other belligerent. The most cursory study of naval history is enough to reveal the falseness of such an assumption. It tells us that the most common situation in naval war is that neither side has command; that the normal position is not a commanded sea, but an uncommanded sea. The mere assertion, which no one denies, that the object of naval warfare is to get command of the sea actually connotes the proposition that the command is normally in dispute. It is this state of dispute with which naval strategy is most nearly concerned, for when the command is lost or won pure naval strategy comes to an end.[5]

In Corbett's framework, command is that condition imposed by one navy on another during wartime, and though the effects may extend globally, the arenas of the contending fleets are limited to regions.[6] Moreover, as revealed by the quotation above, Corbett's definition tends to weave between describing a condition of relative strength between two fleets and the status of an area of water. In this author's view, command strictly denotes the balance of power between or among navies. Water areas may be controlled or not. Conflation of relative strength with water space leads to the kind of error that Corbett himself decries, the kind of error that led to allied efforts early in both world wars to secure the sea-lanes. It turned out that all that could be done was to adopt the convoy system and hunt U-boats from the air. Even the concept of sea control, concerned as it is with military conditions in a specific time and space, is ultimately about ships and

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whether they can be effectively defended or attacked. Command of the sea, then, is a statement about the relative power of navies and the perceptions that attend asymmetry in power. Such asymmetry exists in both peace and war.

In today's globalized world, one characterized by endemic struggle and conflict, nuclear weapons, the Internet, mass communications, and ubiquitous sensing, the dynamics of interstate, intergroup, and intercorporate relations have produced a world of continuous contention, the characteristics of which are significantly influenced by who can do what in the global commons. The geopolitical fact of American naval supremacy influenced the history of the Cold War, just as it influences the dynamics of today's world. Extending the definition of command of the sea temporally (into peacetime) and geographically (to global scope) appears to offer analytic utility in this environment, aiding in the assessment of appropriate risk for naval forces and in the development of effective maritime policies and strategies. In today's world, sea power, even for nations with small coastal navies, cannot be properly understood on any scale less than global. Command of the sea of the kind achieved by the United States and Britain in 1945 is directly associated with overall military and economic superiority, which in turn allows a nation to establish a world order on its terms.[7] Given that the United States and Great Britain were liberal maritime trading democracies, such command underpinned the achievement of the Bretton Woods accords of 1944 and the subsequent evolution of the global system of commerce and security. As Clark Reynolds puts it, "As in the past, however, international agreements depend on the willingness of the participants to live up to them and especially upon the acquiescence of the great powers which are capable of commanding the seas."[8]

The issue of potentiality is also central to the argument. Carl von Clausewitz asserts that possible engagements are to be regarded as real ones because of their consequences.[9] Whereas Corbett regarded command as an operative fact in war, this article seeks to establish command of the sea as a condition in which the various actors perceive the U.S. Navy as enjoying superiority and shape their actions accordingly. These actions may consist of decisions on whether to build a navy to challenge that superiority or decisions on whether and how to support, or at least go along with, American policies. Some of this could be wrapped up into "suasion," as described by Edward Luttwak: "Latent naval suasion continuously shapes the military dimension of the total environment which policy makers perceive and within which they operate."[10] However, for the purposes of assessing risk in the development of naval strategies and doctrine, it is useful to understand modern command of the sea as a condition of naval superiority that influences other nations' decisions in a way that is congenial to U.S. interests, especially as it relates to the maintenance of a global security system that supports the operation of a global economic system.

The onset of the Cold War generated a set of geopolitical parameters that provided context for the way American command of the sea made its presence felt. The development of huge arsenals of nuclear weapons created massive disincentives for the United States and Soviet Union to go to war directly with each other. The USSR, a continental power, attempted to create buffer states and to export its ideology via subversion and proxy wars. The United States was able to adopt a grand strategy of containment based on its command of the sea—which conferred, among other things, the ability to transport the U.S. Army to where it was needed. Moreover, this freedom of movement on the seas was a major factor in gluing together the cordon of alliances that hemmed in the USSR. The Soviets, for their part, built a large submarine fleet that was potentially capable of contesting U.S. command. However, the nuclear balance made the actual use of this capability problematic, and the established fact of U.S. command of the sea could not be reversed short of war.

Nuclear weapons governed another facet of command of the sea as well—concentration. The power of nuclear weapons meant that a whole fleet arrayed in a traditional formation could be wiped out at a single stroke. While methods of tactical dispersal were developed, the larger issue was strategic dispersal. To play its part in the implementation of a globe-girdling strategy of containment, the U.S. Navy had to disperse its forces into multiple regions in any case. Each carrier battle group was more powerful than any local force it could conceivably encounter. On only one occasion, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, were the Soviets able to assemble a locally superior force. Even then, the constraints of nuclear balance and emerging détente prevented the Soviets from leveraging their advantage. The command of the sea achieved by the United States at the end of World War II put it in a military, geographic, and economic position of leadership and advantage that could not be effectively undone by the Soviets in the nuclear age—short of risking nuclear war.

The fall of the Soviet Union created a unipolar situation in which U.S. command of the seas was, if anything, even more complete than at the end of World War II. The total absence of competition made the whole concept seem obsolete and thereby invisible—submerged, as it were, in a sea of peace. The U.S. Navy, though, maintained its global pace of operations, an indication that there was still some geopolitical function that needed to be performed. What was happening was that the process of globalization had kicked into high gear, partly as a result of the Soviet Union's collapse and in part as a result of new global communications technology, including the Internet. The nations of the world were becoming economically interdependent, and what the process needed was comprehensive global security.[11] The Gulf war of 1991 spotlighted the issue of regional instability, and naval forces seemed to be on call almost everywhere. American command

of the sea, instantiated by a fleet sufficiently large to sustain capable presence in multiple regions, continued to define the geopolitical environment of the post–Cold War era.

It should be noted that one of the earliest manifestations of command of the sea—preventing an enemy from moving his army by sea and driving his commerce from the sea—had by now lost its salience. Fleet dispersal was by now an inherent modus operandi for the U.S. Navy. With American global leadership now a virtually unassailable fact, all the factors associated with "command of the sea" disappeared below the waves, and with them use of the term.

COMMAND OF THE SEAS RESURFACES

We must ask why command of the sea could now be relevant again. The answer lies in the changed set of geopolitical circumstances. The issue is not simply that China is building a more capable navy. The point lies in the nature of the global system that has emerged and in the potential consequences for that system if the U.S. Navy suffers even a local defeat at the hands of China, Iran, or some other power.

The process of globalization has created a closely coupled global economic system in which the degree of economic interdependency among nations has made the smooth and uninterrupted flow of resources, goods, and information critical to the economic well-being of all nations. The system can be visualized as a set of nodes and connectors. The nodes are resource-extraction-and-production areas, manufacturing areas, and consumption areas. These nodes are in some cases geographically focused, but most often they are widely separated and geographically noncontiguous. Connectors consist of commercial maritime shipping, airlines and airfreight carriage, mass media, telephony, and the Internet. All this creates a complex economic topology that is tightly interdependent. Consumption places demand on manufacturing, which in turn places demand on resources. Within the manufacturing node, production has become highly parsed, with components for particular goods being made in multiple countries and being shipped, in an intricate global ballet of just-in-time delivery, ultimately to the country that assembles the final product.[12] The history of the last two decades is one of nations joining the system, not leaving it. It is likely that this system possesses a degree of adaptive self-healing capacity to contend with shocks like natural disasters. However, it is not clear what the consequences would be if one nation or bloc of nations withdrew from it or attempted to subvert it by imposing a different rule set.

China is a continental power that is pursuing a continental-style grand strategy. A Eurasian authoritarian regime, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) must garrison its own territory to ensure national integrity. Security for such a regime radiates out from the capital to the national borders. Typically, continental powers from Rome onward have been unable to arrest their security strategies at their frontiers; they have always felt compelled to establish buffers, in the form

of neutralized states or occupied territories, which they eventually incorporate into an empire. This process also takes place at sea, which appears to be manifest in China's focus in its "near seas." China's ambitions in this process have brought it into conflict with neighboring states that claim the same islands and sea areas as Beijing does. Although China has benefited greatly from participation in the global system, for various reasons the CCP would like to change the rules of that system or even create an alternative one, with China as its leader.[13]

China's People's Liberation Army and its component navy (the PLAN) have, in pursuance of its buffering strategy, developed an array of missile, air, and naval forces designed to deny the U.S. Navy access to the ocean areas adjacent to the Chinese mainland, including the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, South China Sea, and even the western portions of the Philippine Sea. In the first instance, these forces are meant to prevent interference by the U.S. Navy if China feels it necessary to use force to prevent a declaration of independence by Taiwan. However, as its interests have broadened and its naval power has developed, China has expanded its military objectives to keeping the United States out of the near seas in order to solidify its greater territorial claims. While many in the U.S. naval establishment regard the evolving operational challenge in East Asia as a regional sea-control issue, there are larger implications with regard to the global system that cause the matter of command of the sea to resurface in a new form.

The current American maritime strategy, "A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower," says that the U.S. sea services will be deployed to defend the global system on a day-to-day basis.[14] In doing so, they will attempt to limit regional conflict, defend the homeland, and prevent war among the major powers. The issue is systemic disruption. According to Stephen Carmel, senior vice president of Maersk Line, "As the last great age showed us, the forward march of globalization is not inevitable, but also not reversible. We cannot slide easily backwards into a better previous time when the pressure gets to be too much. When globalization breaks, it does so violently, permanently altering the trajectory of history."[15] In a potential naval fight between China and the United States, the stakes become the functioning of the global system, given the importance of East Asian manufacturing and container shipping hubs.

In light of the central role of the U.S. Navy in maintaining a stable security environment in which the system, specifically its flows, can function, we may define command of the seas as the condition in which the U.S. Navy, in conjunction with allies and partners, is able to maintain a global security environment that permits unrestricted global systemic flow. In a negative sense, it denotes the inability of any navy or force to impose a defeat on the U.S. Navy that would compromise the latter's ability to carry out this function. If we view a regional sea-control fight through the lens of China's objectives, the U.S. Navy will have been prevented from interfering with whatever operation in the near seas that it

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undertakes. From an American global perspective, this might seem like a regional setback with respect to local sea control. However, the systemic implications turn it into a global matter.

If China is able to chase the U.S. Navy from its near seas, it will change the political calculus of the world and acquire several strategic options. First, it could dictate an alteration of the rules under which the current global system operates. One of these would be the status of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), the two-hundred-nautical-mile band of sea abutting a nation's territorial waters in which certain rights to exploit the resources in and under the water are reserved to the coastal state. Currently, the EEZ is regarded as a high-seas regime, except for reserved economic rights. China wants to expand sovereign rights, to include the ability to exclude outside naval forces from the EEZ. If it can enforce this claim, it will—aside from making virtually the entire South China Sea its "internal waters"—have erased the ability of the U.S. Navy to operate globally to maintain the security environment required by the global system. While not enjoying the kind of comprehensive command of the seas that accrued to the United States in 1945, China would, to a significant degree, rob the United States of that command necessary to underpin the Bretton Woods regime. The consequences for global flow are hard to envision, but if Mr. Carmel is correct in his diagnosis, it would be anything but a graceful degradation. The second option that opens up to China would be the formation of a separate economic system. It could, for example, elevate the Shanghai Cooperative Organization to the status of a modern and more effective version of Napoleon's Continental System.[16] Such a system would not be purely continental, as it is unlikely that a continuing state of war would exist, such that the United States could interdict the organization's shipping. Such a project by China might or might not succeed, but the attempt would likely disrupt the current system catastrophically.

If we "drill down" to operational matters, we can speculate on what the nature of a U.S. Navy strategic defeat might look like. First, we must remind ourselves that China is a nuclear power that, in lieu of a proven comprehensive U.S. missile-defense system, can presumably inflict massive damage on the American homeland. All naval operations are delimited within this context. Second, U.S. naval conventional striking power is substantially invested in eleven large nuclear-powered aircraft carriers. The Chinese, for their part, have heavily invested in various systems to knock these carriers out of action.

With these considerations in mind, we can examine a plausible combat scenario. Postulate: a few years from now the true resource potential of the seabed in the South China Sea is revealed, and it is massive. China decides to assert, fully and finally, its territorial claims to the South China Sea and issues a démarche instructing all other navies to stay outside the "nine-dash line" that essentially

cordons off the whole of that sea as Chinese internal waters. Chinese antiaccess/area-denial forces deploy to the theater. The United States, along with a group of Southeast Asian nations, condemns the démarche, and two carrier battle groups, along with submarines and other naval forces, are dispatched to challenge it. To do so, these forces must sail into the disputed zone.

Let us now assume that the Chinese allow these forces into the zone and then spring a trap, shooting first with missiles and torpedoes, supported by mines. This "battle of the first salvo" succeeds in disabling the two carriers and several surface ships. The president of the United States now has a decision to make. Does the United States continue to "feed the fight" with more naval forces? Does the United States escalate with strikes against Chinese area-denial systems on the mainland? Or does the United States decline to challenge the military status quo and instead call for negotiations? The latter two choices would be politically and strategically unpalatable, at least as long as the United States sees an opportunity to stay in the fight via the first option.

But the question now arises of how much of its navy the United States is prepared to risk in the fight. The criterion on which this judgment is made should be based on an understanding of the role that command of the sea plays in the functioning of the modern global system and on a calculation of how much loss the U.S. Navy can absorb before the edifice crumbles.

Before proceeding farther, it should be noted that there are those who refuse to contemplate issues such as this, being convinced that the U.S. Navy would be able to prevail quickly and decisively, without significant loss, in any such contest. Whether such outlooks are based on computer simulations or fear of admitting potential weakness (whether to the Chinese or to other services, which might take advantage to seize more budget share), they constitute a roadblock to thinking and could leave the national command authority unprepared in case the unthinkable happens. In any case, the purpose of positing such a negative scenario is not to assert that U.S. aircraft carriers are vulnerable but to explore the dimensions of command of the sea. To do so, we have to get on the other side of the loss of several carriers to see how the options play out. Any attempt to discredit this argument on the basis of an assertion that "it would never happen" would therefore be specious.

The foregoing notwithstanding, however, we must first ask ourselves what might happen if the U.S. Navy were successful, if it forced the PLAN to retreat from the scene and was able to prevent land-based systems from achieving significant effects. Would China then withdraw from the system—that is, put an embargo on trade with the United States and its allies? Despite the emotional and cultural imperative of saving face, economic survival might dictate that China keep its ports open and even continue to trade with the United States, if

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only indirectly. In any case, while a Chinese withdrawal from the system would be damaging, it is plausible to think that the system would adapt and remain functional. On the other hand, if the war escalated to the use of nuclear weapons or China won the engagement, the system would likely break.

If a win of sorts is possible for the U.S. Navy, what cost would be acceptable? Beyond a certain level of destruction, given the length of time needed to build, fit out, and work up a modern warship, the U.S. Navy would become less than a global navy. At that point it could no longer provide the security environment necessary for the global system to operate.[17] If the current U.S. Navy, at around 280 ships, is stretched thin and strains to meet demands from regional commanders, the amount and kind of losses it could absorb in a fight with the Chinese and still maintain command of the sea—in its modern instantiation—likely would be relatively low. This is especially the case for aircraft carriers, whose capacity to project power ashore has made them such useful geopolitical chess pieces that President Barack Obama dictated that the Navy retain eleven in commission, even in the face of huge defense-budget cuts. Almost paradoxically, the utility of carriers on a global scale in maintaining the system's security environment makes them too valuable to risk in a regional sea-control fight, even though, or perhaps precisely because, command of the sea is at stake. A posture that would align better with the strategic architecture would be to create a naval force consisting of submarines, smaller surface combatants, and unmanned systems that could impose losses on the PLAN but could also absorb losses without jeopardizing command of the sea.

This brief thought experiment reveals an interesting inversion of naval strategic imperatives that highlights how the nature of command of the sea has changed since Sir Walter Raleigh concocted his syllogism. As codified by both Mahan and Corbett, command of the sea was to be won by defeating or bottling up the enemy battle fleet. This was a matter for the navy's most powerful ships to settle. Once command of the sea was gained, the seas became safe for smaller units, like frigates, to spread out and exercise sea control in specific and local circumstances. In other words, one *fought for* command of the sea—via battle, if possible—and *exercised* sea control, via dispersed security operations. This general relationship held good at least through the end of World War II. Now, however, as we see in our thought experiment, our most capable ships, the carriers, are best used to *exercise* command of the sea—that is, maintain the security environment—while smaller, more numerous forces may have to *fight* a decisive battle for local or regional sea control, the outcome of which would likely have profound global strategic consequences. This inversion is new and runs counter to common wisdom. It must be understood if we are properly to assess risk and structure fleet architecture.

ASSESSING AND MANAGING RISK

"Command of the sea" is a descriptive term. What it describes is a strategic condition. As the world geopolitical environment evolves, so does the nature of the condition that the term describes. Great and broad strategic conditions are not easily encapsulated by a four-word term, so it is both necessary and useful to inquire more deeply into its definition and thus into the parameters of the condition. Such inquiry as we have outlined reveals important relationships between strategic conditions and the nature and use of naval forces.

Naval forces have always been expensive and relatively scarce. Their employment, especially of the largest and scarcest of these, must therefore be attended by clearheaded calculations of acceptable risk.[18] Bottom-up examinations of potential tactical outcomes using computer simulations have their uses, but these must not constitute the sole basis for assessing risk. The enemy could always get lucky, and an understanding of risk from the top-down strategic perspective allows us to understand the consequences of loss in a way that provides better ability to better assess and manage risk.

The inquiry conducted in this article reveals that a new relationship has emerged between command of the sea and sea control, and the kinds of ships that are appropriate to each function. Whether an aircraft carrier is a capital ship in the sense a battleship was in 1922 is beside the point. Their unique characteristics, coupled with today's changed geopolitical circumstances, suggest that they should be used in a dispersed manner to exercise command of the sea on a day-to-day basis, much as British frigates in 1812 exercised sea control around the periphery of the British Empire. While carriers will never be numerous, the implication is that we should have enough of these ships to make them readily available in most regions. The U.S. Navy may never again have more than eleven of them, but assuming most nations have incentives to do their part to protect the global system, their carriers, even including those of China, could be enlisted in the common effort. More total carriers being operated by like-minded nations make the continuous and systemic exercise of command of the sea all the more effective, because they will be available in more places more often. Aircraft carrier building is more widespread today than it has been at any time since World War II. But given their vulnerability to missiles, torpedoes, and mines, why would nations devote their scarce resources to such ships? Beyond national prestige, which is no small thing, it appears that there is a tacit understanding that they contribute to the overall security environment—a corporate command of the sea by an informal condominium of nations all of which, despite particular differences in policy, share a common incentive to keep the global system operating.

The new logic of command of the sea also suggests a kind of strategic equivalence between aircraft carrier forces and amphibious forces. Modern amphibious

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groups, especially when equipped with missiles, unmanned systems, and modern vertical/short-takeoff-and-landing jets, have a legitimate capability to conduct autonomous power-projection operations, thus increasing the capability of the U.S. Navy and others to exercise command in more places at more times, making that command more effective and secure. Moreover, the flexibility of some new designs, such as the *San Antonio* (LPD 17) class, offers the potential of significantly increasing the sea control, shore-bombardment capability, and cooperative international expeditionary operations capabilities of an amphibious group.

There may never be a fight for sea control between the United States and China. If there is, it will be in the American interest to fight it with forces made up of units that are relatively hard to find and hit and whose acceptable-risk profile is more compatible with the conditions that would obtain in the East Asian arena.[19] This would allow the president to feed the fight without placing himself on the horns of a difficult strategic dilemma. If the United States has the option of fighting—and winning—the war solely at sea (on, under, and above it, using joint forces), the strategic risks of nuclear escalation and rupture of the system are minimized. If such a posture is credibly attained through force-structure investments, concept and doctrine development, and strategic communication, deterrence will be enhanced. In the end, the issue may not be U.S. ability to seize sea control in the South China Sea but its ability to deny it to China—a less rigorous and presumably less costly requirement.

"Command of the sea" is not and maybe should not be a doctrinal term, but its utility as a tool for strategic analysis has reemerged. Some may be uncomfortable with its hegemonic overtones, but in a global system environment it is ever more suggestive of an informal partnership of nations, especially in view of the cooperative approach that the current American maritime strategy espouses. A current and sophisticated understanding of command of the sea contextualizes doctrinal concepts and terms such as "sea control," "sea denial," and others, which should improve programmatic analysis and tactical development. "Command of the sea" is an old term that, in a new form, can be usefully leveraged to enhance our understanding of the modern strategic maritime environment.

NOTES

1. U.S. Navy Dept., *Naval Warfare,* Naval Doctrine Publication 1 (Washington, D.C.: March 2010), available at www.usnwc.edu/Academics/Maritime--Staff-Operators-Course/documents/NDP-1-Naval-Warfare-(Mar-2010)_Chapters2-3.aspx. This manual (known as NDP 1), the Navy's keystone doctrinal publication, does not mention the term. It does use "maritime superiority" and "supremacy," apparently as equivalents to "sea control."
2. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1890), chap. 2, p. 138.

3. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Naval Strategy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1919), pp. 5–6, 18. The reader will have to connect the dots of Mahan's argument, but it is clear that he regards a concentrated fleet as the best deterrent against European aggression in the Americas.
4. Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (London: Longmans, Green, 1918), part 2, chap. 2, pp. 100–104. Corbett establishes the relationship between command of the sea and sea control through his discussion of the roles of "cruisers" (frigates, brigs, and sloops, in the days of sail). Frigates especially had a role with the battle fleet as scouts, but they also functioned independently as convoy escorts, privateer hunters, etc., to protect British sea communications and disrupt those of the enemy. The need to concentrate the fleet to secure command absorbed frigates that could otherwise be dispersed to control communications.
5. Ibid., p. 77.
6. Ibid, pp. 114–36. Corbett goes into a rather intricate explanation of concentration and dispersal in naval warfare as distinguished from land warfare. He sees concentration as an elastic concept in which a certain degree of dispersal is inherent. However, his whole concept of concentration revolves around the existence of a "strategical centre" (p. 117), which implies a regional delimitation—for example, Royal Navy dispositions in the eastern Atlantic during Britain's wars with France. Dispersal beyond that to such places as the Indian Ocean or even the eastern Mediterranean would break the concentration.
7. George Modelski and William Thompson, *Seapower in Global Politics 1494–1993* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1988), pp. 16–17.
8. Clark G. Reynolds, *Command of the Sea: The History and Strategy of Maritime Empires,* vol. 2, *Since 1915* (Malabar, Fla.: Robert E. Krieger, 1983), p. 547.
9. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War,* trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), book 3, chap. 1, p. 181.
10. Edward N. Luttwak, "The Political Uses of Sea Power: The Theory of Suasion," in *Strategy and History, Collected Essays* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1985), vol. 2, p. 84.
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