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From the Editors

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FROM THE EDITORS

At a time when China's People's Liberation Army Navy and its national leadership appear to have committed themselves firmly to a program of aircraft carrier development over the coming decades, doubts are being voiced increasingly in the West, and not least the United States itself, over the affordability and operational effectiveness of carriers in the current fiscal and strategic environment. Aircraft carriers have served for some seven decades as in effect the capital ship of the U.S. Navy. Will they continue in this role in the future? In addressing this question, Robert C. Rubel, a retired naval aviator, offers a careful review of the evolving "doctrinal" roles aircraft carriers have played for the Navy in the course of their history and of the emerging strategic and operational challenges they face. He concludes that while some of these roles appear to be obsolescing, the carrier will likely be with us for the foreseeable future, though possibly in lesser numbers and with a reduced emphasis on traditional strike missions. Professor Rubel is dean of the Center for Naval Warfare Studies at the Naval War College.

Among military concepts that never quite seem to come into focus, "sea basing" surely ranks high. Sam J. Tangredi revisits the doctrinal and bureaucratic state of play on this issue. Sea basing continues to be viewed and evaluated in very different ways by the different services; the relative eclipse of the concept over the last several years is a somewhat depressing testimony to the continuing shortcomings of "jointness" in the U.S. military. Tangredi offers a cautious defense of the continuing relevance of sea basing, with reference less to the most frequently cited rationale—the potential political vulnerability of bases located in allied territory—than to the growing physical vulnerability of fixed land bases to long-range ballistic missile attack. Captain Tangredi, USN (Ret.), is a former head of the Strategy and Concepts Branch of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. This article will also appear in a forthcoming Newport Paper on U.S. forward presence in Asia, the Pacific, and the Indian Ocean.

In "Three Disputes and Three Objectives: China and the South China Sea," Peter Dutton next provides a careful review of the regional tensions in Southeast Asia generated over the last several years by China's increasingly aggressive assertion of its claims to the South China Sea at the expense of other littoral states, as well as by its challenge to freedom of navigation and foreign military presence

there, in contravention of a key and long-standing principle of American global maritime policy. Dutton emphasizes the extent to which China's sometimes inexplicable behavior in this arena has heightened its neighbors' suspicions of Chinese motives and intentions and led them to invite the United States to engage more actively on these issues. He argues that it is very much in China's own interest to refrain from unilateralist maritime claims, which can be invoked just as well against it by other states, and suggests that all parties should focus on a mutually advantageous diplomatic solution to the multiple disputes in question. Peter Dutton is a retired U.S. Navy commander and the current director of the China Maritime Studies Institute at the Naval War College.

In "Progressing Maritime Security Cooperation in the Indian Ocean," Lee Corder highlights the maritime security challenges facing the littoral states of the Indian Ocean and, citing in particular the lack of agreed maritime boundaries in many parts of the region, argues the need for new regional institutional structures that can address and help devise solutions to these challenges. Corder notes the progress achieved in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, which had its second meeting in Abu Dhabi in May 2010, but believes that engagement at a more political level would be required to advance the process significantly. He also stresses the importance of involving extraregional maritime powers in such a process. All of this can be seen as an invitation to U.S. naval planners and diplomats to explore ways to implement the agenda of the Navy's "Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower" in a maritime theater of growing global importance. Lee Corder is a commodore in the active reserve of the Royal Australian Navy.

As the United States begins shrinking its military footprint in Afghanistan, it becomes a matter of some urgency to understand what progress it and its coalition partners have actually made toward preparing the conditions desired for the eventual withdrawal of foreign combat forces from that country and the assumption of responsibility for its security by the Afghan government itself. Yet formal efforts to gauge such progress have been late in coming, and the methodologies they utilize have been widely criticized. Two authors with recent hands-on experience in Afghanistan and elsewhere analyze what has come to be known within the U.S. military as "operational assessment" and the reasons why it continues to fall short as a tool of the commander in contemporary counterinsurgency warfare. Jonathan Schroden is a research analyst at the Center for Naval Analyses; Stephen Downes-Martin is a professor in the Warfare Analysis and Research Department of the Naval War College.

Finally, in "Dewey at Manila Bay: Lessons in Operational Art and Operational Leadership from America's First Fleet Admiral," Commander Derek Granger, USN, revisits a signal but neglected moment in American naval

history—Commodore George Dewey’s decisive defeat of a squadron of the Spanish navy in Manila Bay on 1 May 1898. He argues that this action should not be seen merely as a tactical triumph but rather as a model of naval operational art that continues to have relevance for naval officers today. Commander Granger is a June 2011 graduate of the Naval War College.

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