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## A Bimodal Force for the National Maritime Strategy

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## A BIMODAL FORCE FOR THE NATIONAL MARITIME STRATEGY

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*Captain Wayne P. Hughes, Jr., U.S. Navy (Retired)*

While still serving in my first ship, I read a twelve-page article in the Naval Institute *Proceedings* entitled “National Policy and the Transoceanic Navy.” Written by Samuel P. Huntington, this durable and popular essay has stuck with me ever since. As a source of wisdom for confronting both international communism and the Soviet Union, “Transoceanic Navy” is not as incisive as public servant George Kennan’s Long Telegram or as sweeping as theologian Reinhold Niebuhr’s book *The Ironies of American History*.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless I believe Huntington’s article, written in 1954, rivaled them as a guide for the Cold War.

### *1950: The Navy in the National Strategy of Forward Defense*

What were the strengths of Huntington’s description of a “transoceanic navy” for the American nation? They were three. First, he did not speculate on a new direction for the American navy. On the contrary, he described with a clarity all might grasp the changes actually under way both in purpose and composition, and why the changes of strategy and supporting forces should be stable, enduring across changes of administration and military leadership.

Second, Huntington went beyond describing the new maritime strategy then being embraced by the U.S. Navy. He described the national strategy of forward engagement that was being fulfilled by the Marshall Plan for Europe, the restoration of Japan, the fight against communist expansion in Greece, and the establishment of the NATO alliance. He pointed to the creation of the Sixth Fleet in 1948 as the most important arrow of seapower’s transoceanic influence, an arrow sunk deeply into the eastern Mediterranean. He emphasized what was increasingly being taken for granted, namely, the exploitation of naval supremacy

as the cornerstone of a policy of containment and forward defense. He expressed a *national* maritime strategy.

Finally, Huntington was explicit that an armed force must be seen by the American people as relevant and worth supporting financially. He hinted at, though he did not explore, how the investment in military capability must be weighed against present and future national and international economic circumstances.

By the 1960s the roles of the Navy in the forward strategy had become multifaceted. The Soviet Union had achieved its own nuclear weapon capability, and the bipolar U.S.-Soviet Cold War competition had reached a wary stalemate of mutual nuclear deterrence. The Soviet Union had also established a significant

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*Will we have a unifying structure as clear and long lasting as those enunciated by Samuel Huntington and Stansfield Turner?*

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air and submarine threat at sea sufficient to challenge an uninhibited “transoceanic” American naval influence. The Soviet navy would no longer tolerate unmiti-

gated American forward operations across secure oceanic sea lines of communications, and the U.S. Navy could no longer take maritime superiority for granted. Expression of the expanded navy—and national—maritime strategy had to be updated.

#### *1970: A More Complicated Set of Navy Responsibilities*

Starting in 1970, actions by the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) reflected the multiple roles in the design of the fleet. In 1974 Vice Admiral Stansfield Turner, President of the Naval War College, expressed the changes in “Missions of the U.S. Navy,” published in these pages.<sup>2</sup> In his article Turner described a “redefinition of traditional navy roles that had been in effect since 1970.” He wished “to force the Navy to think [about itself in these new roles] in terms of output rather than input.” Like Huntington, he said that a nation of free citizens and skeptical taxpayers was “more interested in what is harvested than in what is sown.”<sup>3</sup> Implicitly he assumed that the United States was a maritime nation exercising a national maritime strategy tied to operations well away from its shores to confront the Soviet Union—and that the Navy was the enabler of that worldwide confrontation and containment. In considerable detail he explained the logic of four supporting missions for the U.S. Navy: *strategic deterrence* of nuclear war, *sea control* to safeguard the sea lines of communication, *projection of power* as the reward and output of the Navy, and naval *presence* forward to affirm American commitment to the defense of the free world. He said other states might have other missions but that these were the four that served our national interests. With varying degrees of emphasis these four missions served the nation

well, became accepted, and ensured popular support for the Navy until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

What led to that collapse and the next great transition? An important nuance to the national strategy of patient containment is well described in a recent book, *The Reagan Imprint*, by Professor John Arquilla of the Naval Postgraduate School.<sup>4</sup> In the 1980s President Ronald Reagan went beyond containment and set out to push back against international communism, while establishing in personal meetings with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that he wanted peaceful competition between the two superpowers and genuine nuclear arms reduction. The U.S. Navy's contribution had never been greater, its presence around the world more important, or its support of overseas activities more crucial than they became during its effort to serve those ends. The Navy was indispensable in fostering the sequence of economic and political consequences inside the Soviet Union that, after a decade or more of unsustainable defense expenditures, resulted in collapse.

#### *1990: After the Fall—A Return to Projection of Power*

By 1991 the consequences as they affected the Navy were nearly identical to what Huntington described as the result of the fall of Germany and Japan. The Navy returned to transoceanic operations to demonstrate its continuing viability and marshal popular support. The role emphasizing projection of naval power was described in a series of CNO white papers, beginning with *The Way Ahead* and the more aptly titled . . . *From the Sea*.<sup>5</sup> These expressed the projection mission explicitly and, directly or indirectly, forward presence for peacekeeping. With a de facto sea sanctuary temporarily assured, the missions were implemented with large ships for efficient delivery of naval combat potential overseas. The Navy bought new, more powerful, and more expensive weapons afloat, and the Marine Corps bought the capability to avoid direct, opposed assault with “ship-to-objective maneuver,” as a safer but more expensive way to conduct what had been its bread-and-butter mission ever since World War II, operational maneuver from the sea.

But forward presence and crisis response became ever more difficult in the 1990s as the nation claimed its “peace dividend” and dramatically reduced the proportion of the federal budget devoted to defense. Navy fleet numbers took a nosedive, from almost six hundred ships to five hundred and then to less than four hundred. Just “being there” was getting harder, and “there” had to be more and more selective as pressure mounted throughout the 1990s to be in the Adriatic, the Arabian Gulf, and the western Pacific for extended periods.

It is deeply ironic that while the size of the fleet diminished by approximately 40 percent the demand on the Navy for crisis response actually rose. What was

worse, the duration of the average response increased greatly. This was true worldwide, but I will cite numbers in the U.S. European Command area of responsibility, because I have studied them the most closely. Before the fall of the Soviet Union, from 1970 to 1989, the number of crises in the European theater requiring response was 2.1 per year, with a median duration of less than a month. From 1990 to 1996 there were 2.6 crises per year, with an average duration of 375 days. At the time of my study (1998) no one knew for sure whether this rash of trouble spots would continue, but it was obvious that neither the peaceable “end of history” of Francis Fukuyama’s famous prediction nor the world harmony anticipated in 1991 was nigh. More and more Sixth Fleet ships and aircraft were being siphoned off to the Middle East. Nor was there any evidence that the demand for American military presence in Gulf waters was going to be eliminated after our swift victory in DESERT STORM. The Navy was using ships that were inefficiently large for the blockade and interdiction roles they were playing. We needed more but smaller ships and aircraft for what have come to be called constabulary roles—a multiplicity of activities that are neither quite projection of power, peacekeeping presence, nor sea control.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile our forces in the Pacific were similarly strained with demands in many places, but most notably with respect to the growing influence of China in East Asia.

What was worse, the coastal sea sanctuary we had enjoyed was in jeopardy. The inshore environment is replete with islands, shoals, bays, and inlets. It is cluttered with coastal shipping, fishing boats, commercial aircraft, and oil rigs. Littoral waters have become dangerous, from mines, coastal submarines, and sudden land-, sea-, or air-launched missile strikes.<sup>7</sup> Crippling attacks on USS *Stark* (1987), USS *Samuel B. Roberts* (1988), USS *Tripoli* (1990), and most recently USS *Cole* (2000) illustrated the variety of potential means, surprise being the one common denominator of every successful attack.

### *2001: A New Transition*

Evidence of the transition under way lies in the almost unassimilable whirlwind of guidance, visions, operational concepts, appraisals, program guidance, and decisions flowing from an unparalleled number of statements of strategy—for starters, a National Security Strategy, a National Defense Strategy, a National Military Strategy, a National Strategy for Maritime Security, a National Fleet Policy, and directives associated with the Quadrennial Defense Review. In addition, we published “Naval Power 21,” “Sea Power 21,” the “Naval Operational Concept,” and the “Navy Strategic Planning Guidance.”<sup>8</sup> The other armed services issued analogous documents.

Where is the staying power of these documents? What convergence, consistency, and cohesiveness? Admiral Michael G. Mullen, the Chief of Naval Operations, is working on a new maritime strategy for the Navy that he hopes can serve as a steady hand on the tiller to last well beyond his personal tenure as CNO and even that of the next presidential administration. If it is to be durable it must be consistent with what de facto has been the long-standing national maritime strategy of forward engagement, empowered by the U.S. Navy, to allow the nation to sustain its political and military influence overseas.

Will we have a unifying structure as clear and long lasting as those enunciated by Samuel Huntington and Stansfield Turner? Let us look beyond Iraq and Afghanistan, not to conjecture future changes in force composition but instead simply to state what is actually occurring and how, almost implicitly, the defense establishment is responding for the long pull into the twenty-first century.

We cannot put equal weight on all circumstances and crises and be, as the slogan goes, always ready for anything, anytime, anywhere. We should describe an affordable American armed force that is no more costly in percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) than now. The present defense budget already costs as much as those of the next five or seven defense establishments, including China's.<sup>9</sup> As Huntington and Turner insisted, the American people will want to know not only what we, the defense establishment, expect to do to serve their interests but also that it will cost them no more than at present.

Let us define a two-pronged national military strategy with two, and only two, objectives: first, the capabilities to deal with a peer competitor, and second, the means to conduct several small operations concurrently. Next we will construct in sweeping terms the capabilities of the force components to meet those two objectives. We must satisfy ourselves that the capabilities of all the services will probably cost no more and might cost less than our present capabilities. The final step is one I do not take here but merely discuss—to assess whether this “bimodal force” is capable of dealing with other situations, if with less efficiency.

### *The Bimodal Defense Establishment*

Even the CNO cannot suggest a *national* maritime strategy.<sup>10</sup> But I can do so, asserting that such a strategy reflects what is happening, is economically viable, will be popular with the American people, and probes more deeply than a transitory response to present circumstances in Iraq and tensions with China over Taiwan. The strategy will reflect not only what is transpiring as it may be inferred from external events but also changes in operations and training that in due course will affect force composition.

The first mode aims at future peer competitors. But for the indefinite future there is only one peer of concern, so let us be explicit: the high end of U.S. defense planning should take aim at the People's Republic of China.

### *Engaging the Emerging Peer Competitor*

Evidently we do not wish to fight China, any more than we wanted to fight the Soviet Union in the Cold War. We want to *influence* China. The exact nature of that influence—whether it be collaboration, containment, or confrontation—is very important, but it will probably change from decade to decade. The question is: How can we best design American military capability as one component of a bimodal force that will be robust across a spectrum of changing relationships with China?

For example, here are two factors to be weighed:

- Foci of current relations with China are the Republic of China on Taiwan and the unhealthy situation in North Korea. A durable American military capability ought to reflect the consequences on force design if an accommodation is reached between “the two Chinas” or if a reunification occurs between North and South Korea. I will outline an American force structure that accommodates either the status quo or peaceful, voluntary transformations. Korea north and south is a situation best viewed not as a potential regional conflict but almost entirely as it relates to China.
- China is in the process of creating an increasingly robust sea-denial capability that reaches farther and farther off its coast. We must anticipate that in due course China will attempt to shift its navy from sea denial to a sea-control capability. This is because it is now beholden to the U.S. Navy to protect its trade and imports of energy by sea. We ought to anticipate that China may decide that this vulnerability is unacceptable for a peer of the United States, or that the U.S. fleet is merely a paper tiger that can no longer protect the trade of China or of anyone else.

The consequences of these two factors are major but need not affect the force design criteria. Here is an outline of the high-end force mode, designed against the only visible future peer:

- *We must maintain strong and influential military capabilities in the western Pacific and Indian Ocean theaters, such that China and its neighbor states know we do not want Chinese soft or hard power to inhibit the freedom and independence of those neighbors.*
- *The first element of U.S. forces is a robust offensive and defensive nuclear deterrent.* China has a nuclear weapon capability. It will grow, as much because of the probable proliferation of these weapons among other Asian



states as because it would serve as an instrument of U.S.-Chinese diplomacy or military confrontation. The offensive and defensive capability also serves importantly against Russia's nuclear arsenal, an old role in strategic deterrence.

- Under no foreseeable circumstances would we invade China. *Therefore, as the second element, we must influence China with American sea and air power, accompanied by close relationships with friendly states that do not wish to see Chinese hegemony in Asia.* Maintaining the viability of our air and naval forces into the indefinite future will require adjustment of future designs in ways not clearly discernable. The designs, however, must anticipate Chinese aspirations for a sea-control navy.
- *As the third element, the American surveillance and reconnaissance advantage must be maintained.* Future designs will probably be a continuation and evolution of the expensive satellite and other high-tech means at which we are expert, accompanied by clandestine penetrations with Asia-centered human and signals intelligence.
- *Fourth, we will also need a command and control (C2) advantage using networking technology.* We in the Department of Defense (DoD) have been self-critical of our own efforts, yet a reasonable appraisal of our information technology is that the services and American industry have invested great amounts of money and have achieved an advantage over the competition that will serve well if edge-of-war tension arises between China and the United States. But China as a potential peer competitor has the industrial and intellectual skills to catch up, a situation to be avoided through constant vigilance.
- *Fifth and last is the logistics component that maintains the fighting elements in the western Pacific.* This is an expensive component that takes a substantial fraction of the defense budget. For example, without its air wing an aircraft carrier is only a highly efficient and mobile airfield. As a "logistics" component, the carrier costs roughly the same amount of money as its aircraft. Long-haul logistical support is the responsibility of the Navy and the Air Force; thus, with respect to China these services will be sustaining their own operations. Keying on China makes it easy to see where to base forward support—in Hawaii, South Korea, Guam, Japan, Okinawa, and Singapore, for example—and the desirability of warm friendship with the Philippines.

*The Other End of the Spectrum: Small Wars and Peacemaking*

By “small wars” I refer to the global war on terror and to constabulary and humanitarian operations. “Stability operations,” “irregular warfare,” and “counter-insurgency” are frequently used terms. A good shorthand word is *peacemaking*. The upper limit of “small wars” is arbitrary, but the American forces that have fought them have constituted no small fraction of military capability, if we call to mind the Indian wars on the western frontier (1865–90), Army operations during the Philippine Insurrection (1899–1902), and Marine Corps peacekeeping operations in Central America in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>11</sup> A superb book covering the long history of U.S. Army and Marine performance at the small-wars end of the spectrum is Max Boot’s *The Savage Wars of Peace*.<sup>12</sup>

In small wars, a severe complication is that armed forces are often not in control. Though the DoD must design in advance a capability for a wide range of peacemaking operations, the forces will neither constitute the entire capability nor be governed exclusively by a military command. In contingency and

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humanitarian operations, DoD influence will be shared with the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, sometimes the departments of Justice and Home-

land Security, and even nongovernment organizations. No one below the National Security Council can establish, in the several instances going on all over the world, how U.S. operations are intended to proceed and goals to be accomplished. Further, these will be coalition operations, with host states and other participating nations.

There is another important distinction. The Weinberger-Powell Doctrine says American armed forces should not be committed without sure knowledge of how the operation will conclude. It also mandates the use of sufficient—implying preponderant—force. Neither criterion can apply to small wars or constabulary operations, which tend to be open-ended. The war against stateless terrorists is much more like the never-finished “wars” on crime and drugs than what Weinberger envisioned—a war between states that ends in capitulation or a negotiated peace after American aims are achieved.<sup>13</sup>

A complementary doctrine for “small” operations is badly needed. The lack of one does not mean there has been no effort to distinguish between the two ends of the spectrum of conflict. Three diverse examples will suffice, taken from thinking now under way at the Naval Postgraduate School. Jan Breemer offers different principles for insurgencies in his prizewinning essay “Statistics, Real Estate, and the Principles of War.”<sup>14</sup> Raymond E. Franck and Terry C. Pierce describe the

United States as a near-perfect enemy for terrorists and suggest things we could do to be a tougher opponent, in “Disruptive Military Innovation and the War on Terror: Some Thought for Perfect Opponents.”<sup>15</sup> Commander (now Rear Admiral) Bill McRaven, a Navy SEAL, recognizes that classical theory of war and its principles need modification for special warfare. His master’s thesis on the subject was published as *SpecOps* in 1995.<sup>16</sup>

Despite these complications it is possible to describe the force elements for small wars and operations. The elements will contrast sharply with—be virtually disjoint from—the forces for use against the peer competitor, at the other end of the spectrum of warfare.

- Nuclear deterrence that applies against self-governing states—in fact, the concept of deterrence itself—is irrelevant. A separate, expensive, warlike campaign is now under way to forestall terrorist attacks of grave consequences. *The aspiration of this small-wars force element is to prevent even one nuclear, biological, or chemical weapon attack.*
- *The second element comprises the forces to engage in small wars and operations, namely ground forces, with tactical support from the air. The primary role of the Navy and Air Force here is to deliver the ground forces to the scene of action rapidly and sustain them, often for months or even years.*<sup>17</sup>
- *The third element, intelligence and surveillance, is primarily based on human intelligence. “HUMINT” takes time to establish, is difficult to maintain, and is costly—so much so that it must be placed selectively, for a blanket capability around the world would be unthinkably expensive. High-tech intelligence gathering is also part of the formula. High tech can be more quickly deployed as we learn how to insert effective “hastily formed networks” employed by signals intelligence experts, but effective small-wars intelligence and surveillance are different in most respects from the intelligence/surveillance/reconnaissance network against China.*<sup>18</sup>
- *The fourth element is a command-and-control system to link coalition forces and agencies outside the American military establishment. Those who tilled this weed-strewn soil in the heyday of NATO know that even for operations between semipermanent, treaty-governed forces under international command, the problems of reliable, secure, swift communications are endless. One way to appreciate the future difficulties in small-wars C2 is to imagine the challenges as the U.S. Navy develops a highly desirable, multinational “thousand-ship navy.”*<sup>19</sup>
- *Fifth is the logistics element that delivers, supports, and sustains the forces operating on land. Sea and air components do the long-haul delivery. Army,*

Marine Corps, and special forces conduct mostly their own in-theater support.<sup>20</sup> Since in small wars there will be hot spots in many places around the world, agility and adaptability become bywords for these operations, much more so than for confronting China. Logistics is again a very large and costly component. The advantage of smallness in scale is offset by the vast panorama of possible contingencies, the many places they occur, and their history of ugly longevity.

Observe again the striking contrast with the force composition for the peer competitor. Operations carried out by a peacemaking force are quite dissimilar. This is why a force designed for the middle—crudely, the composition that served well for “two major contingencies” in the 1990s and until the watershed attacks in 2001 against the Twin Towers and the Pentagon—is badly configured to handle either the China or small-wars end of the spectrum of conflict.

### *Affordability*

The aim in American competition with China should be to keep that competition economic and political. Each side has advantages and disadvantages. We watch the Chinese economy warily, on one hand, because strong, sustained growth will sharpen the competition and, on the other hand, because a collapse or serious downturn might create internal political chaos there that would without doubt affect the world’s economy as well as our own. At the same time there are plenty of concerns for the American economy. The short-term causes are much in the news, but the vital aspect is our long-term economic health. Health implies not the absence of bubbles and downturns but resilience through exploiting the virtues—some would say the mean-spiritedness—of capitalist competition. Defense’s contribution, one that assuredly will be demanded by the American people, is to avoid excessive expenditure.

Economic considerations at the small-wars peacemaking ends of the spectrum must be based on confrontations that cannot be peaceful. Here we will not infrequently resort to force of arms and must expect to fund a stream of “small” operations. Inescapably the long war against terrorism will be episodic and marked by many campaigns, some of them long lasting. What is the expected economic impact on defense expenditures? I don’t know. Despite much inflammatory rhetoric, the cost of operations in Iraq has been modest compared with wars like Korea, Vietnam, and upward. Evidence from American history is a mixed bag. The American economy did not seem to suffer when substantial fractions of the Army and Marine Corps were engaged in many constabulary operations overseas from 1898 until World War II. On the other hand, when the “Two Ocean Navy” buildup commenced in the mid-1930s during the Great Depression, the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration seemed eager to disengage,

replacing peacekeeping in Latin America with a Good Neighbor Policy. But if we are to focus effort on peacemaking around the world, it would be useful to know the economic history, along with the military history, of small wars of the nineteenth-century British Empire and of the early-twentieth-century United States.

The often unnoticed expense of the transoceanic strategy is logistical. I know of no data, but at a guess half the U.S. defense budget is expended just to operate our forces transoceanically. It is an unavoidable cost at both ends of the bimodal spectrum. It is a burden borne by no other nation.

A suitable benchmark is a defense budget that does not grow as a fraction of the gross domestic product. The federal government took its “peace dividend” and reduced defense expenditures substantially in the 1990s. Expenditures bottomed out at 3 percent of the GDP, their lowest point since the late 1940s. Since the DoD budget is still by far the largest defense budget in the world, we should aim to work within the current level, which is now between 3.5 and 4 percent of GDP. The Congress and the nation should be cautious about increasing it, because economic strength is as important as military capability and international political influence.

The war on terrorism extends well beyond Defense Department operations. There are many players, not least the Department of Homeland Security. A strong homeland defense alone can never be sufficient: first, because with the advantage of initiative terrorists will sooner or later penetrate any defense; second, because a disastrous attack would be economically crippling; and third, because as we have already seen from expenditures for airline, port, and many other forms of domestic security, homeland defense is extremely expensive and plays into the enemy’s hands economically. Our successful strategy must continue to be a combined “homeland defense and overseas offense.” The overseas operations, borne mostly by DoD, are expensive because we must go and often stay somewhere—and that “somewhere” is many places. Yet conducting overseas operations will be far less costly in the long run than keeping our guard up only at home.

In terms of affordability, the watchword for influencing China is *blend*—the right mix of economic, military, and political astuteness. The watchword for small wars is *caution*—awareness that employing forces can become as expensive as procuring them. Wars, big and small, are notorious as a way in which great powers have destroyed their economies and brought themselves to ruin.

#### *Wars in Between?*

After conjecturing a suitable, affordable bimodal force, the final step is to test how much risk is entailed should there be a theater war for which it is not configured. There should be no concern that the shift is risky. For better or worse, the forces the Navy, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, Army, and Air Force operate now

will be the foundation of their capabilities for at least a decade. During the last fifteen years the armed forces were configured to fight two major contingencies. Except for the Coast Guard, all were *designed* for “wars in between.”

In the forty years when U.S. policy was to contain the Soviet Union, the armed forces were designed against a single foe. With patience, military readiness, and diplomatic wisdom we and our allies avoided war with the Soviet Union. When we employed the same forces in many other fights (often to resist Soviet-sponsored communist expansion around the world), they were ill designed and sometimes badly trained for such operations, from major theater wars fought in Korea and Vietnam down to such successful crisis responses as the first Lebanon (1958), Grenada, and Haiti and unsuccessful ones like the Iranian rescue mission, the second Lebanon (1983), and Somalia. A future combination of high- and low-end bimodal forces to deal with major contingencies cannot be perfectly suited either. The combination might be imperfect but sufficient. Or it might entail so much risk that we would not wish to undertake the operation. I cannot imagine who the high-risk “in between” enemy can be, so readers must specify their own foes to conquer—or achieve a negotiated peace with, per the Weinberger Doctrine. They should pick their foes for the 2020–30 time frame, because it will be that long before a new bimodal force replaces the present two-contingencies force. The more the reader surveys the world and picks several different foes, the better the test will be.

### *The Navy in the Bimodal Force*

The American navy is transitioning from a fleet that responded to the 1990s program guidance to handle two major contingencies, nominally centered on North Korea and Southwest Asia. In that guidance maritime superiority was taken for granted, there was no peer to influence, and small wars were ignored. Today the Department of Defense, with the Navy following in its wake, has transitioned away from two-contingencies force planning.

Half the transition concerns relations with China. I have mentioned the steady shift of Navy forces from the Atlantic and Mediterranean to the western Pacific. Although the American people still take sea control largely for granted, the nations of Asia do not. They welcome the American navy because they depend on it to protect their sea lanes. The Pacific Fleet concerns itself today mostly with Taiwan and Korea, while supporting friends of the United States and warily watching the extension of China’s sea-denial capabilities. Just beyond the horizon is a predictable aspiration in China to achieve sea control in the western Pacific and Indian oceans, with the prospect that the U.S. Navy must think seriously again about command of the seas and the share of the fleet designed specifically to retain maritime superiority in the twenty-first century.

The other half of the transition is a force designed for the large number of “small” operations, expeditionary in nature, in which the Navy will continue to participate. Partly these operations are to respond to state crises, instabilities, and insurrections; partly to resist stateless terrorists, pirates, drug runners, and illegal immigrants; partly to guarantee energy supplies for the free world; and partly to answer natural or man-made disasters with humanitarian operations, in which the Navy has been leader and major contributor. The Navy no longer regards these many activities as “lesser included cases” of theater war. It now says they entail forces with unique capabilities and has started to develop fleet components that can be distributed in more and smaller packages and to partner frequently with our international friends.

Huntington and Turner both emphasized the need for popular acceptance and tied it to affordability. The transition under way will appeal to the American public but not be so popular that the U.S. Navy’s budget will grow. A rash of recent studies expresses concern about the shrinking size of the fleet.<sup>21</sup> These studies point out that at the same time the number of ships in the Navy has gone down, its total combat capability has gone up in terms of missiles carried to sea, aircraft sorties flown, accuracy of weapons delivered, and rate of targets attacked. But they conclude that within the current shipbuilding budget—and by implication the aircraft procurement budget—the current force of only about three hundred ships must shrink further, barring a change in average unit cost or a reconfiguration to smaller ships in a more distributed force. The essential point is that all of these generally Navy-friendly and well-intended studies *assume* that the shipbuilding budget cannot increase.

We don’t know in detail what the Navy force should look like. We know it will come from the loom that wove the fabric of the projection-oriented Navy of the 1990s, which in turn was partly composed of the residuals of the four-mission Navy of the 1970s and 1980s. The existing Navy comprises large, efficient ships to project power to the land, principally in the form of air strikes, missiles, and Marine elements. Against China, the need to threaten air and missile strikes will not change, but China is developing the means to attack large ships at sea. It is time to explore a more distributed fleet that is offensively disposed yet can suffer losses and fight on, for no defense at sea can be perfect against a skilled opponent. Marine elements have a muted role, if any, in the naval configuration to influence China. The Marine Corps will continue to win the support of Congress and the American people as staunch, adaptive fighters, but they will retain that support by being proficient in small wars and peacemaking operations.

Nor do I mean to say large aircraft carriers and ships for amphibious assault will soon be useless and should be scrapped. On the contrary, the carriers are efficient and of proven versatility in almost any small-war contingency. Carriers

are so valuable in fact that one might wish to have aircraft flying from as many as twenty-five or thirty “airfields” afloat. The nation cannot, however, afford the cost of building and operating thirty large carriers, the CVNs. The practical approach is to sustain an affordable number of CVNs and supplement them with smaller, more distributable airfields at sea that carry unmanned aerial vehicles, helicopters, and (one may hope) STOVL\* aircraft—the performance of which may not match CTOL aircraft but are suitable for small wars.<sup>22</sup> Nor should existing amphibious ships be discarded just because the need for opposed, forcible entry is rare. Their aircraft, small craft, bunk space, and medical facilities give them proven value in constabulary and humanitarian operations.

The submarine force is a major player in any attempt to influence China. One can easily envision a “no-man’s-land” in the East and South China seas where neither warships nor commercial traffic dare to venture on the surface, creating the “empty ocean” once predicted by John Keegan, who foresaw a time when

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*The Navy was indispensable in fostering the sequence of economic and political consequences inside the Soviet Union that resulted in collapse.*

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nothing could survive on the surface.<sup>23</sup> American submarines destroying commercial ships will represent a paradoxical return to times past but a logical expansion of their present missions. As with aircraft carriers, the issue will not

be having too many submarines but too few of them, because nuclear propulsion is expensive. If this new mission transpires, the construction of nonnuclear submarines will make sense to complement the present all-nuclear-powered undersea fleet.

Submarines will continue to play a central role in nuclear deterrence. But for active defense when deterrence fails, missile-launching cruisers on the surface will, when properly positioned in the right numbers, be able to shoot down many or most of any enemy’s regional and intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The U.S. Navy has great capacity to adapt its aircraft and missiles afloat. Our missile cruisers and destroyers update their offense by updating their missiles. Modernization of the defense is harder, a future problem not yet solved. The solutions will probably be different for a confrontation with China than for small wars. The Navy is experimenting with mission modularity while simultaneously taking a cautious step toward a more distributed force with two new Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) designs and experimentation with other small, high-speed ships. As the Navy shifts focus to “green-water” (inshore) and “brown-water” (riverine) operations, a continuation is predictable of the trend toward more and smaller air and surface combatants inshore.

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\* STOVL: short takeoff, vertical landing; CTOL: conventional takeoff and landing.



A very recent Navy role is defense against terrorist attacks in ports and in the littorals. Still evolving, the role is shared with the Coast Guard, the Department of Homeland Security, port-city governments, and other agencies domestically. It is also being worked out with foreign governments internationally. There is no more clear-cut evidence of a de facto bimodal approach by the Navy than the sharp distinction between its contribution to nuclear deterrence against responsible states and its commitment to help protect against nuclear, chemical, and biological attacks by irresponsible stateless entities.

I have emphasized scouting and networking as critical components. Navy surveillance, reconnaissance, and C2 networks are not hard to put in perspective, for legacy systems—most of them unheralded, invisible, even intangible—become obsolete much faster than ships and aircraft in the fast-moving world of information technology. Weighing the cost-effectiveness of updates is a continuing process, quietly going on, because the investment cost is substantial. Against China, Navy high-tech systems are robust and more or less the right ones; “Steady as you go” is a reasonable rudder order. At the small-wars end of the spectrum, there is (in gross terms) simply a vacuum to be filled. A benefit of concentrating on the need will be to accelerate stronger human intelligence, network security and intrusion against diffuse foes, operational connections with friendly states, and a structure to work with other American agencies.

Navy personnel are a different, special aspect. The important descriptor of the people factor is *turnover*. The downside of personnel turnover is constant, inescapable turbulence, because of the perpetual need for recruiting, training, and assignment, which has a much greater effect on military organizations than on businesses. Associated is the seemingly never-solved problem of balance in career-long experiential and educational maturation to achieve sufficient numbers of qualified people working in new technologies, foreign relations, strategy, and the economics of defense. But my purpose here is to point out the rarely noticed upside: that personnel turnover is the way to step out of the past and accelerate a transition. This opportunity to transform people is especially important for the Navy, whose major pieces of large, expensive equipment sometimes must last forty or fifty years. The Army and Marine Corps, it seems, are transitioning faster, because lives now depend on grasping the demands for the tactics and training of peacemaking. The Navy, because of its sea sanctuary, has not been shot at much and has had less motivation to change. That is why a rich understanding of the bimodal force’s implications is the path out of the hardware straitjacket.

Do you doubt that a transition can occur without new sensors and weapons because new tactics and operations are impossible without new hardware? A little reflection should convince anyone otherwise. Between the attack on Pearl

Harbor in December 1941 and the start of the great sweep westward to Japan that began at Tarawa in November 1943, every class of U.S. Navy warship changed its role, from battleships to aircraft carriers, to heavy and light cruisers, to destroyers, and even to submarines. They were the same warships, but with a great sense of urgency the crews were taught new combat roles, and the new roles were supplemented with almost invisible new capabilities to complete the fighting fleet that would soon carry the war to the Japanese home islands.<sup>24</sup>

Personnel turnover is the opportunity to change, and the training and education to effect the change are explicitly the CNO's responsibility. From my perspective on the faculty of the Naval Postgraduate School, he will know the transition is complete when we in the Navy schools are teaching to the demands of the bimodal force, from language skills to inshore combat.

### *Transitions and Transformations*

The swift changes in the fleet during World War II can be called *transformational*. They were sudden and radical, only dimly foreseen, and urgent, because national survival was in question. Military organizations—successful ones, at least—respond quickly when the national jugular is threatened. In normal times, the steady state offers a great power the opportunity for *incremental* refinements of its fighting machine's tactics and equipment that everyone understands and is comfortable with. I have used the term "transitional" to describe changes that are neither transformational nor incremental. A transition is impelled by external events and is observably occurring. It need not be wrought in an atmosphere of crisis and desperation, but if the new circumstances are not recognized or if the flywheel of continuity resists the need for orderly transition, the eventual result will be a radical, abrupt, financially irresponsible transformation. The Army and Marine Corps have been criticized pitilessly for their less than perfect peacemaking in Afghanistan and Iraq. I think they deserve more sympathy than they have received as long as they are in transition, evolving and adapting into what I've called bimodal forces.<sup>25</sup> The American armed forces have never before fought to the standard of perfection of today's critics. "The Greatest Generation" that won World War II would by today's standards be judged incompetent. The Navy has been transitioning perhaps too slowly, but it also deserves some slack. First, the need for a bimodal navy is less evident, because the fleet has scarcely been attacked or suffered loss at sea. Second, the current Chief of Naval Operations has already established the foundation for a new, durable maritime strategy.<sup>26</sup>

If Admiral Mullen and the Navy's leadership succeed, the strategy will lead to the right education and training, soon followed by an affordable system of ships, aircraft, sensors, command-and-control systems, and logistical support for a

bimodal force structure to sustain the Navy's part of a durable *national* maritime strategy for well into the twenty-first century.

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#### NOTES

This article was prepared for a Center for Naval Analyses-sponsored conference, "The Future of Maritime Strategy," held on 26 October 2006.

1. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Ironies of American History* (New York: Scribner's, 1952). Niebuhr wrote on the values of Western civilization, the need to preserve them, the innocent attempts to improve on them, and the malevolent attempts to replace them with fascism and communism. He said it was absurd to say the sins of the West were in any way comparable to the crimes of Soviet despotism. He counseled resistance by patience, temperate resolution, and economic warfare but never by the use of nuclear weapons. George F. Kennan sent what became famous as the "Long Telegram" from the American embassy in Moscow in 22 February 1946. The widely read version was that published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1947 as "The Sources of Soviet Conduct."
2. Stansfield Turner, "Missions of the U.S. Navy," *Naval War College Review* 26, no. 5 (March–April 1974), pp. 2–17, reprinted in vol. 51, no. 1 (Winter 1998), pp. 87–103.
3. "The people" is the great American tyrant, the more so because constitutional interpretations grant both the majority and several minorities enormous and inconsistent influence. It is, however, probably a correct generality that our taxpayers expect their armed forces to stay ahead in the latest technology but suspect that building new technology into every piece of equipment (tanks, ships, aircraft, etc.) is unaffordable.
4. John Arquilla, *The Reagan Imprint: Ideas in American Foreign Policy from the Collapse of Communism to the War on Terror* (Chicago, I. R. Dee, 2006).
5. These documents are reprinted in John B. Hattendorf, ed., *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1990s: Selected Documents*, Newport Paper 27 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 2006), available at [www.nwc.navy.mil/press/npapers/np27/NP27web.pdf](http://www.nwc.navy.mil/press/npapers/np27/NP27web.pdf).
6. One way to update Turner's missions for the Cold War, and one in which constabulary roles fit more comfortably, appeals to the four functions of a navy described in Wayne P. Hughes, Jr., *Fleet Tactics and Coastal Combat* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1999), p. 9: at sea, a navy (1) ensures that our own goods and services are safe and (2) that the enemy's are not; from the sea, it (3) guarantees safe delivery of goods and services ashore and (4) prevents delivery ashore by an enemy.
7. Worldwide, by far the largest share of damage to merchantmen, tankers, and warships since 1967 has been inflicted by missile attacks.
8. For the "Naval Operational Concept" and the "Navy Strategic Planning Guidance" see Hattendorf, ed., *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1990s*.
9. One wonders whether the closed society of the People's Republic of China is as clever in concealing its actual defense expenditures as was the Soviet Union. Even if that were true, U.S. defense expenditures would still dwarf all others.
10. The Chief of Naval Operations is responsible for organizing, training, and equipping the Navy. He does not make strategy, not even naval strategy, but he cannot fulfill his responsibility without knowing how the navy he leads will be employed by the combatant commanders who will fight it. Therefore CNOs have expressed their design intentions as "maritime strategies" and the like. These statements have been welcome and clarifying.
11. Some say Army stability operations in the Philippines lasted much longer.
12. Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). Boot disregards humanitarian operations, however.

13. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger developed the doctrine for the 1980s with the assistance of his military aide, Colin Powell. It much influenced Powell's actions as secretary of state and is frequently called the "Powell Doctrine" now. The doctrine says that all the following six tests are to be met before committing forces to fighting overseas: vital U.S. or allied interests must be at stake; "combat troops" should be "committed wholeheartedly . . . to win"; political and military objectives should be clearly defined; objectives and forces "must be continually reassessed and adjusted if necessary"; there must be reasonable assurance of support by Congress and the American people; and commitment of forces to combat should be the last resort. There are subtleties in all the tests. For example, they recognize that a great power never dabbles by going in, getting bloodied, and backing out; it stays until the "clearly defined objectives" are met. Combat troops are seemingly specifically at issue here, so that the doctrine does not extend to bombing or missile attacks from afar.
14. Published in *Military Review* (September–October 2006).
15. Appearing in the June 2006 *Defense and Security Analysis*.
16. *SpecOps: Case Studies in Special Warfare Theory and Practice* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1995).
17. Reflection on the history of peacekeeping and peacemaking operations will convince the reader that these four short lines are too cryptic. Seeing that is the beginning of small-wars wisdom, for "small" operations are in fact extraordinarily intricate and hard to describe, and require small-wars professionals. Consider merely the past and present inshore and riverine roles of the Navy. Nevertheless, I cling to the belief that small wars are first and foremost operations by the Army, Marine Corps, and special forces on the ground.
18. "Hastily formed networks" is a term used by a consortium of Naval Postgraduate School faculty with practical experience in rapid deployment to several Asian states and in humanitarian support of the 2004–2005 tsunami and Hurricane Katrina relief operations.
19. "Thousand-ship navy" is a term introduced by the CNO to foster coalition operations at sea. The purpose of the slogan is not to create a bigger navy on the cheap but to ensure that the U.S. Navy is not thought of as the policeman of all the world's coastal waters.
20. It does no harm to point out again the frequent intricacy of small-wars logistics. "Mostly" admits of in-theater air and river traffic, too.
21. Five of these are Stuart E. Johnson and Arthur K. Cebrowski, *Alternative Fleet Architecture Design* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense Univ., 2005); Congressional Budget Office, *Options for the Navy's Future Fleet* (Washington, D.C.: 2006); Robert O. Work, *The Challenge of Maritime Transformation: Is Bigger Better?* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2002); and Ronald O'Rourke, *Potential Navy Force Structure and Shipbuilding Plans: Background and Issues for Congress* (updated 30 March 2005) and *Navy Ship Acquisition: Options for Lower-Cost Ship Designs—Issues for Congress* (updated 10 November 2005) (both Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service).
22. STOVL aircraft can fly from an aircraft carrier much smaller than a CVN. CTOL aircraft fly from large carriers. Before World War II the Army Air Corps demonstrated that carrier aircraft could not match land-based aircraft performance (in operational ceiling, range, payload, etc.). But the flexibility of a moving airfield was recognized and valued, carriers prospered and multiplied, and by midwar our carrier aircraft performance matched or exceeded that of Japanese army and navy aircraft.
23. John Keegan, *The Price of Admiralty: The Evolution of Naval Warfare* (New York: Viking, 1988). Keegan's conclusion (pp. 266–75) is entitled "An Empty Ocean." However he does not do justice to the fact that blue water "no-man's-lands" have existed since aircraft became ship killers and that, sooner rather than later, control of the oceans' surface must be established so commerce can move on it.
24. These tactically influential equipment changes included radar, the Combat Information Center, a proliferation of short-range antiaircraft guns, second- and third-generation aircraft, and torpedoes that worked. Old battleships were used for shore bombardment, because they were designed before World War I and

lacked speed to stay up with the fleet. The new fast battleships, the first six of which were commissioned in 1941–42, went with the fleet but relinquished their capital-ship role to aircraft carriers. Most of our mine force, amphibious ships, landing craft, and PT boats were built from scratch to fill a void.

25. “Bimodal force” is, by the way, an inelegant if eye-catching term. I will be happy if “bimodal” does not long survive this article, although I

believe in the need for the kind of force structure it connotes.

26. Among other things, Admiral Mullen’s tasking for 2006 directs: “Develop adaptive force packages and flexible deployment concepts to include NSW, U.S. Coast Guard, and coalition partners in support of operations in blue, green, and brown water environments that are aligned with the National Fleet Policy and the National Strategy for Maritime Security.”