Maritime Security Cooperation
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Much attention has been given to the ways governments are changing the use of their ground forces, especially when it comes to conducting peacekeeping, stability operations, and counterinsurgency. This attention is no surprise given that NATO countries had more than 250,000 military personnel deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan at its peak and about three million citizens of NATO countries are veterans of those conflicts. Operations there revealed that ground forces were saddled with training foreign forces during stability operations and had to overcome a conventional warfare paradigm in an environment characterized by intrastate conflict. Their experiences more broadly inform how military forces are changing for a future characterized by security deficits created by subnational, transnational, and regional challengers.

Ground forces are not the only ones changing; the U.S. Navy has been changing too—maritime civil affairs, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief, and security cooperation have become core competencies. Partners expect this and there is a strong constituency that sees “the U.S. Navy is the backstop for securing a stable global financial system for the U.S. economy to operate in.” NATO-, EU-, and U.S.-led naval coalitions around the world are providing port security, patrolling strategic lanes of communication, combating piracy, interdicting migrants, delivering humanitarian assistance, conducting medical diplomacy, and cooperating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to promote development. These are very different missions from those for which warships were designed and differ considerably from traditional sea service roles that focus on preparation for interstate conflict. In particular, the U.S. Navy is adapting to cooperate with partners’ coast guards and navies to localize sea-borne threats before they impact freedom of navigation or exploit the maritime commons for illicit activities. Furthermore, warships are serving as logistics platforms for NGOs to conduct fisheries conservation, provide medical assistance, and deliver relief supplies after natural disasters. Through the global fleet station concept in Africa and Latin America, the U.S. Navy has illustrated how it can improve security and train coast guards
to patrol their territorial waters and monitor their exclusive economic zones. Finally, navies are cooperating to counter threats from regional challengers to the existing international order such as Iran in the Persian Gulf, China in the East and South China Seas, and Russia in northern Europe.

**Strategic Basis for Maritime Cooperation**

Underlying the change in navies is an effort to export security to build defense relationships that promote specific security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and coalition operations, and provide U.S. forces peacetime and contingency access. The U.S. seeks to prevent conflict by helping other regimes through security cooperation, which includes all Department of Defense interactions with foreign defense establishments. Vice Adm Robert Thomas, who commanded Seventh Fleet, wrote, “One of the unique aspects of navies is that we meet and interact with each other on neutral turf. We operate in international waters and international airspace. At sea, we are mariners regardless of our nationality; in the air, we are aviators regardless of our political beliefs.” These ideas are well grounded in defense strategy highlighted in the Quadrennial Defense Review, “We will strengthen joint planning with allies and partners to operate multilaterally, across domains, and to counter challenges to access and freedom of navigation.” This was further explained in the National Military Strategy, “we remain committed to engagement with all nations to communicate our values, promote transparency, and reduce the potential for miscalculation.”

The U.S. helps countries fill security deficits that exist when a country cannot independently protect its own national security. American generosity helps explain this, but U.S. national security benefits too. For example, by providing radars and surveillance technology, Central American countries can control their airspace and can interdict drug-filled planes bound for the U.S.; by providing logistic support, Pakistan can lead a coalition promoting maritime security in the Indian Ocean; and by selling AEGIS destroyers, Japan can deter North Korean missile attacks and provide early warning of missile threats to the United States.

**Global Maritime Partnerships**

As the term implies, Adm. Mike Mullen, former CNO and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has made clear that partnership “is purely voluntary and would have no legal or encumbering ties. It would be a free-form, self-organizing network of maritime partners—good neighbors interested in using the power of the sea to unite, rather than to divide. The barriers for entry are low. Respect for sovereignty is high.” The overall goal is to create partnerships, not dependencies. The 2015 U.S. maritime strategy devoted an entire section to international partnerships because “By expanding our network of allies and partners and improving our ability to operate alongside them, naval forces: foster the secure environment essential to an open economic system based on the free flow of
goods, protect U.S. natural resources, promote stability, deter conflict, and respond to aggression.” In the Pacific, this means that the U.S. Navy participates in over 125 exercises and over 350 working port visits per year to promote confidence-building measures among our friends, partners and allies. By developing or improving global maritime security capacity, the U.S. Navy seeks partners that can suppress threats in their territorial waters before they become threats to international sea-lanes. Furthermore, by addressing threats far from U.S. shores, partners form the first line of defense for the United States.

Naval cooperation is not new, yet in an era when major naval engagements are rare, “the ability for countries’ warships to come together in a disciplined and controlled environment remains a valuable stepping-off point for follow-on diplomatic progress.” There are many examples since 2001: NATO in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean; Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia in the Strait of Malacca; and various coalitions in the Gulf of Aden and East Africa. Rear Adm. Terry McKnight, who commanded a naval coalition in the Indian Ocean, commented on how a diverse set of countries are providing naval forces to improve maritime security: “CTF 151 is a coalition of the willing. I never thought that in my service I would be operating in the same water space as the Chinese and Russians and co-operating on an issue of mutual interest [piracy].”

Given its shrinking fleet and global challenges, the U.S. Navy has embraced maritime partnerships to augment its own force to improve maritime security. More than a decade ago, senior Navy strategists Vice Adm. John Morgan and Rear Adm. Charles Martoglio wrote, “policing the maritime commons will require substantially more capability than the United States or any individual nation can deliver.” They recognized that a superpower has limits, transnational actors increasingly generate maritime insecurity by capitalizing on weak security structures, and regional challengers are uniting friendly navies to cooperate at sea. Ten years later, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) reiterated the concept noting, “By leveraging the robust capacity of navies worldwide, we are better postured collectively to face new and emerging challenges in the 21st century. There is no magic number of ships required to make coalition operations successful. What does matter is getting the right mix of capacity and capability in the right place, at the right time.”

The United States seeks partnerships with other navies to create the proverbial thousand-ship navy, which can respond to subnational, transnational, and regional challengers to protect important sea-lanes. This came to fruition when the U.S. ceded leadership of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command’s Task Force 50 (CTF-50) to France in December 2015. Vice Adm. Kevin Donegan, who commands Naval Forces Central Command / U.S. Fifth Fleet, noted the importance of this: “U.S. and French Navy forces have forged an alliance that has made our countries a more formidable fighting force than either could be alone.” France would not have been able to lead the CTF without strong bilateral relations, years of operating together, and a concerted security cooperation effort
to make forces interoperable. The French commander, Rear Admiral Rene-Jean Crignola agreed: “We are making a step forward regarding interoperability building between our navies. One cannot always imagine all the dedicated and patient common work that was necessary throughout the years to reach such a result.”

Building Maritime Partners
In addition to cooperating with NATO allies and developed partners like Japan and South Korea, the United States helps build maritime capabilities through security cooperation. Partner maritime forces often lack the ability to process and disseminate the broad spectrum of information and intelligence necessary to assess maritime activity in their area of responsibility. This shortcoming prevents early threat identification and effective response. To offset this security deficit, U.S. maritime forces can provide presence with a very small footprint. Through forward engagements, the Navy contributes to the U.S. government’s efforts by bolstering allies, friends, and new partners. For example, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (U.S. Fifth Fleet) in Bahrain supports dozens of countries patrolling the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf with logistics, intelligence, and command and control. Theater security cooperation programs teach navies visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) techniques, conduct mine countermeasure exercises, and export surface ships. The Naval Operations Concept casts these activities as maritime security force assistance, which “promotes stability by developing partner nation capabilities to govern, control, and protect their harbors, inland and coastal waters, natural resources, commercial concerns, and national and regional maritime security interests.”

Improving national maritime capabilities for economic reasons will also keep international navies and coast guards engaged in the region for the foreseeable future. Maritime security cooperation benefits include improving countries’ abilities to monitor their territorial waters and exclusive economic zones, developing capabilities to respond to crises at sea, and improving the state’s ability to provide security. In addition to the tangible benefits of cooperation, a major benefit includes empowering maritime partners to enforce maritime law. Witness Australia fly U.S.-built aircraft, Japan steam U.S.-built warships, and the Philippines deploy U.S.-trained Sailors to contest China’s expansive maritime claims.

Promoting cooperation also extends to national governments through the rubric of maritime sector reform. One tangible benefit of U.S. military-hosted conferences is improving the dialogue between civilian and military agencies on national maritime strategies and port security operations. Because security issues are no longer the exclusive realm of militaries, a major security cooperation goal is to bring together personnel from law enforcement, port authorities, think tanks, and other relevant civilian government ministries such as natural resources, customs, and finance. These conferences have an explicit goal of improving interagency cooperation within respective countries and
sharing knowledge across countries.

Conclusion
Given the disappointments in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, there is a potential for the value of security cooperation to be ignored, but these programs are not confined to ground forces in combat zones alone. When thinking about security cooperation, we should look at how international partners contribute to coalition operations and global security. Declining force structure and an unstable security environment will likely reinforce the importance of security cooperation, as the US will need more partners and allies to augment its own defense capacities. Security cooperation has become a panacea, but those inside and outside of government must understand the importance of security deficits, how militaries are changing from forces of confrontation to forces of cooperation, the challenges of the “by, with, and through partners” approach, and why security cooperation is an important pillar of defense strategy to be institutionalized at the operational level.

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2 Security cooperation is defined in military doctrine as “All Department of Defense interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific US security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide US forces with peacetime and contingency access to a host nation.” Chairman, US Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Joint Publication 1-02, DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, March 2015. http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary


