Maritime Security and Great Power Competition: Maintaining the US-led International Order

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Abstract

Maritime security operations sustain and enforce the rule of law and good order at sea. Yet in an era of great power competition (GPC), do those activities support national strategy? This paper offers a structure for answering that question, placing maritime security in the context of GPC by describing competition as a function of control for the international system. The framework introduced in this paper demonstrates that maritime security is an important component of maintaining a system that benefits US security and prosperity. The framework also shows that there are two roles for maritime security in GPC—avoiding corrosion of the US-led system by great powers and avoiding corrosion caused by lesser powers. These two approaches have different implications for Navy deployment, procurement, and employment policy. Consequently, although our analysis suggests that maritime security is integral to GPC, its roles can vary, pulling resources in divergent directions according to policy priorities.

Cover image credit: 180817-N-LI768-1091 PACIFIC OCEAN (Aug. 17, 2018) The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Dewey (DDG 105) launches a Tomahawk cruise missile while underway in the western Pacific Ocean. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Devin M. Langer)

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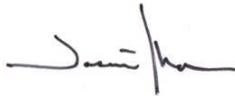
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Executive Summary

Great power status reflects a state's outsized stake in, or effect on, the international order. Defined this way, great power competition (GPC) is more than just a matter of conflict—it is a battle over the order itself. Yet analysts have struggled to articulate precisely what it means for great powers to compete on a day-to-day basis. This challenge is particularly problematic for the Navy, whose deployments may not always fit into a narrative focused on conflict. Maritime security operations—the activities that sustain the rule of law at sea—figure heavily in the Navy's daily tasks. In an era of GPC, do such activities support national strategy? If so, how? And what does that mean for Navy policy as the force faces ongoing pressure to prepare for high-intensity conflict?

Competitors and competition in GPC

To answer these questions, it is useful to target how maritime security intersects with national strategy. And to do that, we built a framework that simplifies strategy along two axes:

1. **Types of competitors.** Competitors are a strategy's adversaries, which are described and categorized differently over time. Presently, US strategy differentiates among great powers (China and Russia) and lesser powers (Iran, North Korea, and nonstate actors such as ISIS).

2. **Types of competition.** Competition is the nature of the US's interaction with adversaries. A common tool for describing competition is conflict spectrums, spanning high-intensity armed conflict to less-intense forms of competition.

When we plot these axes (Figure 1), we can see four categories of strategy emerge:

1. Preparing for or executing high-intensity conflict with a great power
2. Competing with a great power in less-intense forms of competition
3. Competing with a lesser power in less-intense forms of competition
4. Preparing for or executing high-intensity conflict with a lesser power.

Figure 1.   Competition and competitors—a framework for strategy
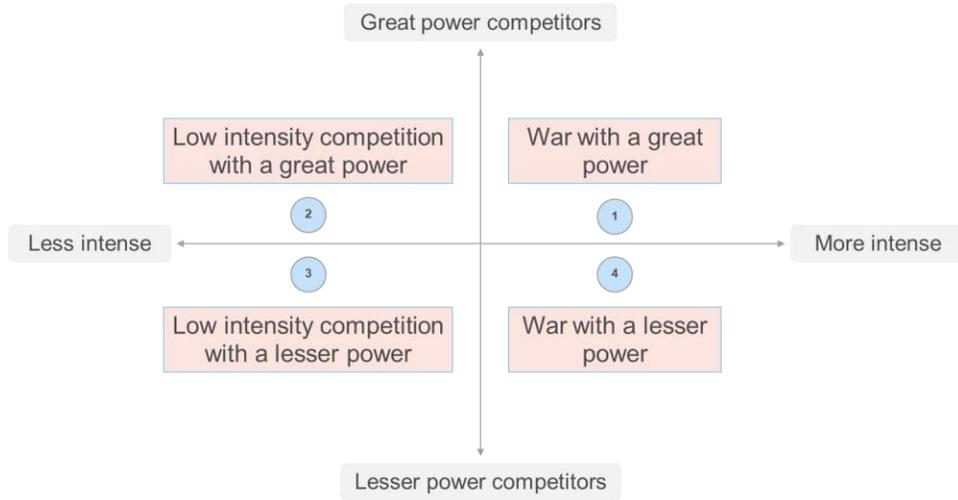
Source: CNA.

Reflecting on the role of maritime security, these categories leave us intuitively oriented toward combating great and lesser powers at low-intensity levels (quadrants 2 and 3), but without a deeper sense of priority or intent, only a vague conclusion that maritime security can play a role in competing with most rivals below high-intensity conflict.

This exercise shows that a competition axis based on conflict spectrums does not sufficiently articulate the underlying objective of day-to-day competition. We propose augmenting that axis with one describing GPC as a *contest over the international order*—specifically, the defense and maintenance of the international institutions, laws, and norms that govern interstate relations. The current order is successful in part because it is partially *voluntary*—states aspire to join because a US security umbrella and predictable rules create safety, stability, and prosperity. Challenging and overthrowing the international order is a central threat to US security and prosperity. Control over the order is what victory looks from the US perspective in a GPC environment.

Depicting competition according to order defense and order maintenance is valuable because it helps us articulate why maritime security warrants such extended analysis. Given seapower's ability to deliver calibrated coercion or reassurance with little to no footprint, order maintenance tasks have constituted an enduring component of what policymakers ask of the Navy. Although strategists often think about the Navy's role from the perspective of defending the order from overthrow, real-world Navy operations reflect a reality that is equally

if not more concerned with the *maintenance* of the US-led order. Maritime security is thus integral to order maintenance and, by extension, an important component of GPC.

Only great powers can overthrow or replace a global order, based on our assessment of how a state achieves great power status. Guarding against that risk means defending the order from acute threats, a great power war. A wider variety of actors can corrode an order so that it becomes less effective and desirable over time. Corrosion may not result in an immediate replacement of the order but can precipitate its general weakening and disintegration, which benefits the actors with the highest stakes in revising the rules (i.e., rival great powers). Preventing such corrosion is a function of long-term order maintenance. And since serious corrosion from any actor redounds to the benefit of rival great powers, any corrosive threat to the international order is relevant to GPC. This updated competition axis, including acute order defense and longitudinal order maintenance, is reflected in our revised framework below (Figure 2).

Figure 2.   Refining competition—order defense and order maintenance in GPC
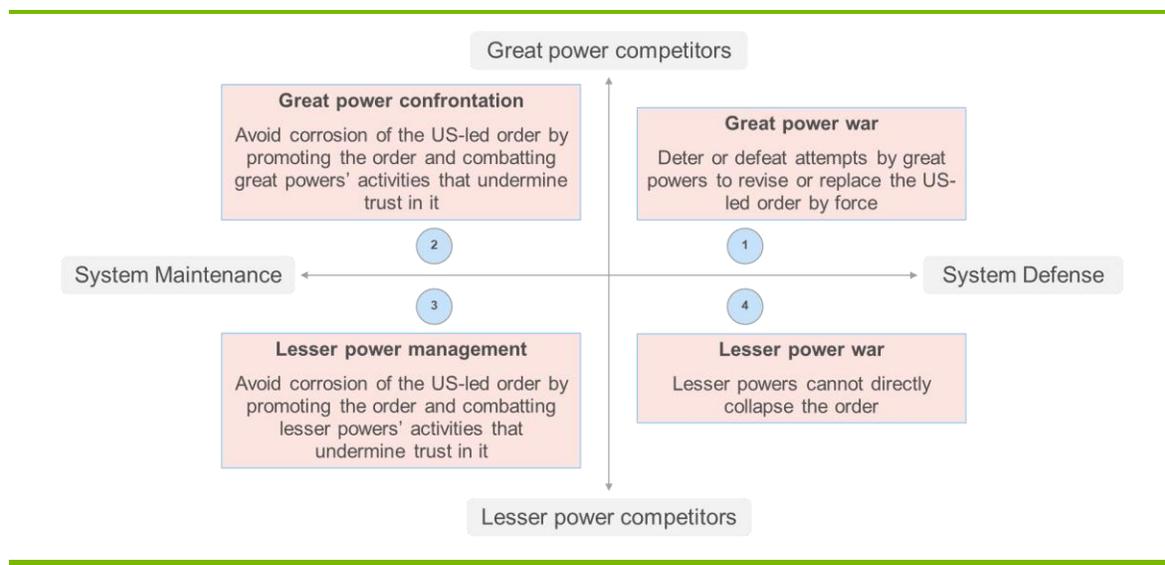
Source: CNA.

This framework produces two approaches where maritime security plays a clear role in GPC:

- *Avoiding order corrosion by great powers*—what we call ***great power confrontation*** (quadrant 2). Great power confrontation focuses on promoting the order in the face of great power efforts to weaken it through means other than war (e.g., "gray zone" campaigns or "salami-slicing" tactics).

- *Avoiding order corrosion by lesser powers*—what we call ***lesser power management*** (quadrant 3). Lesser power management focuses on promoting the order in the face of asymmetric efforts from less powerful competitors to corrode norms and rules (e.g., sanctions evasion or threats to global commerce).

Implications for Navy policy

In theory, these two approaches to order maintenance—great power confrontation and lesser power management—are not mutually exclusive. In practice, though, they yield different policies for where the Navy operates (deployment), what the Navy buys (procurement), and what the Navy does (employment).

Great power confrontation

The implications for Navy policy in a great power confrontation approach are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.   Findings—Navy policy implications of a great power confrontation approach

Deployment	Procurement	Employment
A fleet that comprises mostly multi-mission platforms distributed in multiple areas (much like the present day) best matches this approach (see p. 16 for more on deployment models).	This approach faces low barriers to execution for procurement policy, given the similarities to current Navy policy (see p. 17 for more on procurement).	Willingness to employ high-end, multi-mission forces for order maintenance tasks is central to this approach (see p. 18 for more on employment).
This approach would result in a relative de-emphasis on the heavy footprint of high-end multi-mission assets in the Middle East.	Existing procurement policy would nevertheless benefit from adjunct, low-cost, geographically transferable maritime security capabilities for this approach.	Concepts stemming from the implications of low-end tasking on high-end readiness require reassessment to ensure that forces are used for the operations this approach prescribes.

Source: CNA.

To operationalize a great power confrontation approach, **we recommend the following**:

- Augmenting the mixed-use fleet with *low-cost maritime security assets* in regions outside of major fleet concentrations to compete with China and Russia globally.
- Establishing a process for *matching requests for limited maritime security forces against order maintenance requirements* regarding Chinese and Russian activities.
- *Resurrecting fleet stations* with low-cost assets and minimal staffs in regions outside of major fleet concentrations, enforcing norms held at risk by China or Russia while minimizing the need to divert larger assets.

Lesser power management

Navy policy implications for a lesser power management approach include the following:

Table 2.   Findings—Navy policy implications of a lesser power management approach

Deployment	Procurement	Employment
Two fleets that are multi-mission and multi-area but split according to warfighting (order defense) and maritime security (order maintenance) objectives best fits this framework.	The Navy's current procurement policy supports the acquisition of the warfighting force, which looks similar to today's multi-mission assets.	Separated fleets would require a more judicious employment of high-end forces, which would be husbanded to prepare for great power war.
The warfighting component can capitalize on the infrastructure of existing fleet concentration areas, though less preexisting infrastructure is available to support the forward distribution of stations for the model's maritime security force.	The maritime security force would be composed of vessels that are ill suited for major warfighting and/or proactively suited for small-scale operations. This requires an acquisition process for assets with different operational requirements than the warfighting fleet.	This approach requires a greater willingness to build and employ a larger cadre of less-capable platforms for order maintenance requirements, given the limited role for the warfighting force in maritime security tasking.
A substantive maritime security footprint in the Middle East is consistent with this approach.		

Source: CNA.

To operationalize a lesser power management approach, **we recommend the following**:

- *Identifying the scale of a maritime security force the Navy can afford,* given the force rebalance this approach augurs, and matching the number and size of forward stations accordingly (prioritizing the Middle East first).

- *Designing an acquisition process separate from the warfighting fleet* to ensure lower costs when sourcing platforms for the maritime security fleet. Assets should include older platforms to achieve scale and other capabilities according to a station's needs.

- *Identifying distinct command and control frameworks* for managing warfighting and maritime security fleets to ensure that each is used as intended.

Contents

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Introduction

Great power competition (GPC) directs a lot of attention to the high-end capabilities needed to deter or defeat the United States' most powerful competitors. Yet competition is broader than just high-intensity conflict, which invites deeper questioning of the relationship between less intense forms of conflict and GPC. Although analysts are increasingly asking what GPC means for day-to-day competition, few have asked about the relationship between GPC and the Navy's maritime security mission. This focus is important because the surface Navy's perpetual deployments are typically dominated by maritime security operations—theater security engagements, freedom of navigation operations, humanitarian assistance, and so on.

The objective of maritime security is "to create an environment that supports free and legitimate use of the maritime domain" and thus aims to prevent, deter, or mitigate activities that threaten such free and legitimate use.[1] Maritime security is the constellation of operations that sustain and enforce the rule of law and good order at sea.[2] But how does that objective interact with broader national strategy? Does maritime security relate to GPC at all? If so, how? And what does that mean for Navy policy as the force continues to face pressure to prepare for high-end, high-intensity conflict?

This paper will offer a framework for answering these questions, placing maritime security in the context of national strategy and then connecting that analysis to implications for Navy policy. As the force pivots to a more explicit focus on high-end, high-intensity conflict, it may be attractive to find cost savings by trimming maritime security operations and capabilities. The impetus behind this research is to minimize the surface Navy's risk of nonstrategic (i.e., indiscriminate) divestment in policies that have implications for maritime security— deployment, employment, and procurement policies, specifically. As we will see below,

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[1] Alison C. Lawlor and Kimberley M. Hall, *Defining a Maritime Security Warfare Area: A Concept Paper for a New Warfare Area* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2007), 4. It may also be useful to offer concrete examples of such missions, which include (inter alia) limited strikes, sanctions enforcement, humanitarian assistance, counterterrorism, sovereignty assertions, diplomacy, environmental monitoring, and governance administration. See Peter M. Swartz and E. D. McGrady, *A Deep Legacy: Smaller-Scale Contingencies and the Forces That Shape the Navy* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 1998), 8–9. A list of capabilities for maritime security derived from the Universal Navy Tasks list is useful for those who wish to connect doctrinal language to the concept of maritime security. See, Lawlor and Hall, *Defining a Maritime Security Warfare Area*, 7–13.

[2] Geoffrey Till argues that the term "Maritime Security" has supplanted the long-standing maritime concept of good order at sea, both causing some confusion but also underscoring navies' interests in combating a wider set of threats to stability at sea. Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 25, 283.

maritime security appears to be integral to GPC, albeit in ways that can pull resources in divergent directions. Thus it would serve the Navy's long-term interests to specify an approach for maritime security, align that approach to objectives within GPC, and utilize that approach to explicitly protect or grow critical low-intensity capabilities and operations.

GPC and Maritime Security

Identifying where the Navy should sustain or increase maritime security investment is a complicated proposition. Policymakers cannot know the future, and any policy decisions on force procurement, deployment, and employment include inherent risks. Ideally, these risk are not adjudicated in a vacuum, but are guided by a thorough assessment of national priorities in the development and refinement of national strategy. In other words, policy should be responsive to strategy. But how does maritime security factor into such strategy development and policymaking?

Competitors and competition

One way to triangulate maritime security's relationship to strategy in an era of GPC is to deconstruct strategy into its component parts. By doing so, we can develop a framework that allows us to ask more targeted questions. To that end, it is useful to organize strategy around two analytical axes.

Types of competitors

Competitors are the adversaries (typically states or nonstate actors) that a strategy identifies. Often, these adversaries emerge inductively and capture most of a strategy's attention. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was the chief adversary. In the post–9/11 period, al-Qaeda became the central competitor in US strategy. A proliferation of potential adversaries necessitates further differentiation. Consider the evolution from the late 2000s' "Four plus One" construction to the late 2010s' refinement of "Two plus Three" as representative of DOD's growing desire to provide more nuance in the way it differentiates competitors.[3]

Current US strategy distinguishes competitors according to great power status, though without offering explicit guidance on how states acquire such status. One available benchmark from the international relations literature (and the one we will use here) divides power according to a

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[3] Jim Garamone, "Dunford: Global Security Environment Has Implications for Joint Force," *DOD News*, December 1, 2016, https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1017146/dunford-global-security-environment-has-implications-for-joint-force/. Aaron Mehta, "The Pentagon's National Military Strategy is done, and it's unclear if the public will ever see it," *Defense News*, February 13, 2019, https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2019/02/13/the-pentagons-national-military-strategy-is-done-and-its-unclear-if-the-public-will-ever-see-it/.

competitor's ability to overturn or replace the existing international order.[4] Great powers are those nations that can credibly threaten to do so, while lesser powers (and nonstate actors) cannot.[5]

Types of competition

Competition is the nature of the US interaction with competitors, a dynamic that strategists frequently look for ways to qualify. DOD's use of operational phases of war (e.g., Phase 0, Phase 1, etc.) is one such example. Another can be found in more-recent literature charting the contours of the gray zone and hybrid warfare.[6] The post–Cold War "operations other than war" (OOTW) construct also wrestled with the nature of competition in an era devoid of great power competitors. Strategies often deploy spectrums of conflict to help qualify different types of competition. These scales are typically bound by high-intensity armed conflict on one end and progressively less intense forms of competition toward the other end of the axis. The Joint Chiefs of Staff has recently embraced a spectrum that includes cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict as its three major nodes.[7] Other strategies—such as the Navy's *A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority, Version 2.0* (aka "Design 2.0")—leverage

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[4] There are myriad ways to define great power status. A 2020 CNA report on the subject summarizes those definitional approaches into two primary categories—power and scope. The power categorization identifies great powers based on military criteria, through either overt strength or latent power (i.e., economy and population). The scope criterion divides great powers according to either their stake in a global system or their role in managing it. In this paper, we utilize both dimensions of the scope definition. As the defending great power, the US has the greatest responsibility for system management, but all great powers have major interests that extend across the global system. As the report summarizes, definitions of great powers based on systemic interests "require a great power to exert an effect throughout the interstate system, be involved with other states around the world, have some stake in relations between all other states, and have a sizable influence on the shape of the international system." Cornell Overfield and Joshua Tallis, *Great Power Relations: What Makes Powers Great and Why Do They Compete?* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2020), 6, https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DIM-2019-U-021755-1Rev.pdf.

[5] This is consistent with the systemic assessment of power transition pioneered by Robert Gilpin in *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[6] See, for example: US Special Operations Command, *The Gray Zone*, September 2015, https://publicintelligence.net/ussocom-gray-zones/; Joseph L. Votel, Charles T. Cleveland, Charles T. Connett, and Will Irwin, "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 80, 1st Quarter (2016): 101–109, https://ndupress.ndu.edu/JFQ/Joint-Force-Quarterly-80/Article/643108/unconventional-warfare-in-the-gray-zone/; Frank Hoffman, "The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict: Protracted, Gray Zone, Ambiguous, and Hybrid Modes of War," 2016 Index of Military Strength, Heritage Foundation, October 31, 2015, https://www.heritage.org/military-strength-topical-essays/2016-essays/the-contemporary-spectrum-conflict-protracted-gray; Michael Kofman, "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts," *War on the Rocks*, March 11, 2016, https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts/.

[7] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine Note 1-19, *Competition Continuum*, June 3, 2019.

their own spectrums. The apparent lack of consensus on how to differentiate types of competition contributes to the ongoing debate regarding what exactly the competition part of GPC means.[8] Such ambiguity is also problematic if we want to understand the role of maritime security in competition.

Mapping out our two axes illustrates how differentiating competition according to somewhat generic terms (e.g., armed conflict and competition below armed conflict, or high intensity and low intensity) fails to help us fully understand the role of maritime security in national strategy. This depiction (Figure 3) yields four quadrants, each of which can be understood as a specific approach within the broader strategic framework:

1. Preparing for or executing high-intensity conflict with a great power
2. Competing with a great power in less intense forms of competition
3. Competing with a lesser power in less intense forms of competition
4. Preparing for or executing high-intensity conflict with a lesser power.

Figure 3. Competition and competitors—a framework for strategy
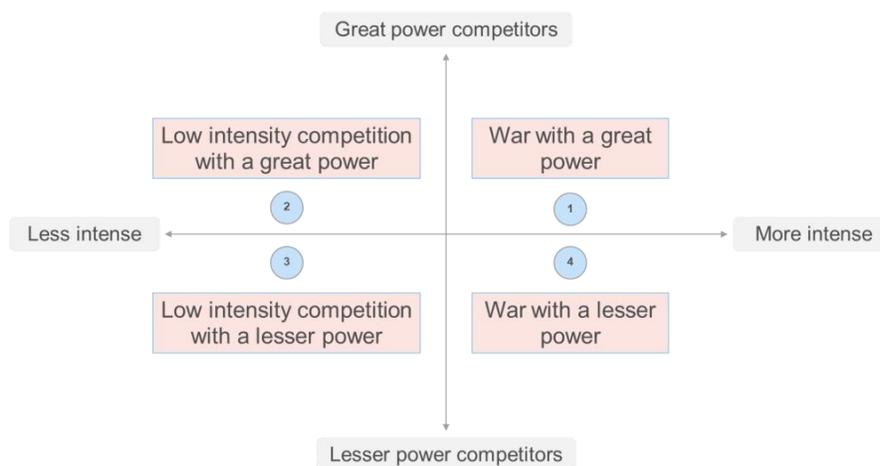
Source: CNA.

The question of maritime security's role in each approach is not entirely resolved. We can speculate that maritime security likely does not play a sizeable role in preparing for or executing high-intensity conflict, which eliminates quadrants 1 and 4. We can also speculate that maritime security does appear relevant to less intense forms of conflict (quadrants 2 and

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[8] For example, the term is not defined in the *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (as updated January 2020), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf?ver=2018-02-21-153603-643.

3). But should we further down-select only to quadrant 2? After all, *great powers* characterizes the present era, yet current strategy does not entirely exclude consideration of lesser powers either. Apparently, we are left with a general orientation toward quadrants 2 and 3 without a deeper sense of priority or intent, but with the vague and unsurprising conclusion that maritime security can play a role in competing with great or lesser powers below the threshold of high-intensity conflict.

This is not a particularly helpful conclusion, considering that the space of low-intensity competition is expansive. Yet this is about as far as current strategy can take us, at least explicitly. To truly understand how maritime security intersects with great power competition and derive practical implications for policy, we must refine the axis of competition into a more useful taxonomy. And although current strategy falls short on that score, there is a relevant clue embedded in GPC's distinction of competitors according to power status.

Competing for what?

If we define great power status as a state's outsized stake in or effect on the international order, we can understand great power competition as a battle over that order and who gets to write its rules. Writing the rules is the "top prize" of the battle, since the rules benefit the winner and the predominant political and ideological structures they prefer. Challengers can threaten the US-led order in different ways, the most catastrophic being violent overthrow of the order. Yet this is not the only threat to the order, nor may it be the most likely.

The US-led order is successful in part because association with the international order is somewhat voluntary—states aspire to join liberal-capitalist commercial and political structures because the combination of a US security umbrella and predictable economic rules creates a largely safe, stable, and prosperous dynamic.[9] The desirability of participating in that structure—of accepting and benefiting from a US security apparatus and economic policies that are broadly favorable to American enterprise—is partially contingent on the US sustaining certain core legal and normative commitments, many of them stemming from the sea.

These obligations—ensuring freedom of navigation, enforcing international laws and norms, implementing multilateral sanctions, containing terrorism and piracy—represent

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[9] Robert Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World* (New York: Knopf, 2018), 70. A 1950 US National Security Council policy paper provides nearly contemporaneous evidence that this principle was bound up with the founding of the postwar world order. It notes that it is "a general source of strength to us that our relations with our allies are conducted on a basis of persuasion and consent rather than compulsion and capitulation." National Security Council, "Note by the Executive Secretary to the National Security Council on United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," NSC 68, April 14, 1950, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v01/d85.

fundamental order maintenance tasks. The less the international order is maintained, or the more the rules of the order are challenged and/or shaped by adversaries, the less desirable and beneficial the US-led order may become for its constituents. Consider one of the most prominent contemporary examples, Chinese promotion of its Nine-Dash-Line claims in the South China Sea as superseding international law as agreed to in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

While only major powers can overthrow and/or replace a global order, actors up and down the power spectrum can corrode an order so that it becomes less desirable and effective over time. The result of such corrosion may not be a wholesale replacement of the global order but, rather, its general weakening or fracturing into spheres of influence, where powers apply the rules particularly unevenly,[10] a disintegration that benefits rival powers. In other words, the nature of competition in an era where US strategy tilts toward great powers centers on US stewardship of the international order. This is a central concept that is lacking in our original framework. We can update the framework by supplementing a nebulous competition spectrum with the more specific poles of *acute order defense* and *longitudinal order maintenance*.

Figure 4. Refining competition—order defense and order maintenance in GPC
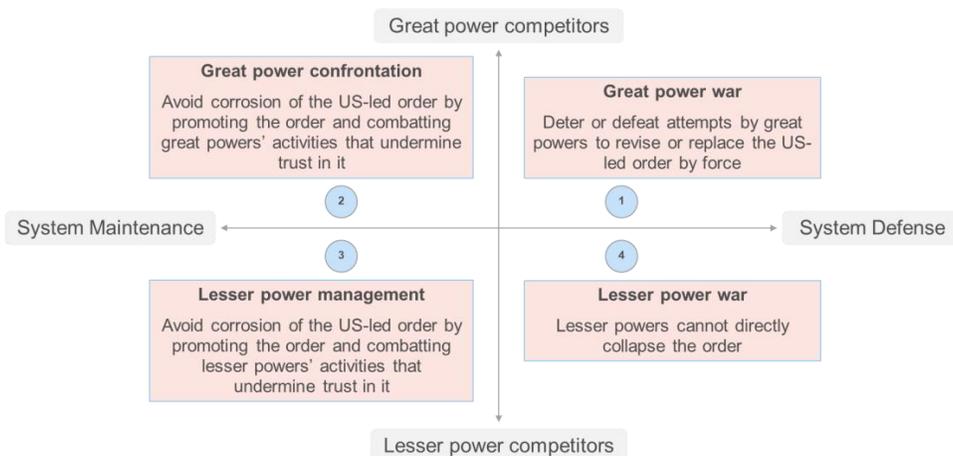
Source: CNA.

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[10] Spheres of influence are not necessarily evidence of a weak (or broken) international order. See Bruce Bordner, "Rethinking Neorealist Theory: Order Within Anarchy," University of Virginia, December 1997. The international system functions according to established principles, but the system is also layered by other, smaller hierarchies. These spheres of influence may observe most international laws, restate them in their special security circumstances, or qualify or reject them in favor of their own special strategic or ideological needs. One theory of corrosion's effect on the system is what happens when changes in power dynamics manifest themselves in either expanding spheres of influence or efforts to expand the autonomy of those smaller spheres from the broader rules of international law as described by the larger system.

Now, instead of just stating that maritime security's role aligns with competing against great and not-so-great powers at less intense levels of conflict, we can say more meaningfully that maritime security is an important feature of managing trust in the US-led order. This is a relatively straightforward observation, given the definition of maritime security as enforcing good order at sea, and again reflects many of the surface Navy's core competencies and activities.

Understanding competition according to the defense or maintenance of the international order is also valuable because it helps us articulate why maritime security is worthy of such extended analysis. The surface Navy provides policymakers with a unique tool of diplomacy and coercion. The ability to signal strength or partnership dynamically, without the threatening and expensive use of ground forces, is an enduring advantage of naval power.[11] For this reason, maritime security operations are not only strategically significant in an era of GPC, they are also a common mechanism by which policymakers engage in maintenance of the international order.[12]

Given seapower's ability to deliver calibrated coercion or reassurance without an onshore footprint, cost-effective and nonescalatory order maintenance has constituted a long-standing component of what policymakers ask of the Navy. Indeed, as one noted naval analyst writes, "the Navy has almost always been involved in smaller-scale contingencies (SSC) and operations other than war (OOTW). For long stretches, these operations were all that the Navy did."[13] So while strategists often think about the Navy's role from the perspective of *primacy,* ensuring that US capabilities far surpass the next greatest competitor, the Navy policies that leaders pursue reflect a reality that is equally if not more concerned with the *maintenance* of the US-led order. Although Navy policy is frequently "derived from a practice of reasonably being prepared for low-probability/high-risk threats such as major war," in practice policymakers often ask the Navy to devote "most of its efforts to system-maintenance missions."[14] Thus, in

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[11] James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy 1919–1991,* 3rd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

[12] Consider some recent system management operations. The US Navy conducted at least four freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) in 2019 in the South China Sea alone ("FONOPS," *The Diplomat*, accessed January 29, 2020, https://thediplomat.com/tag/fonops/). And when the Trump administration wanted to punish the Syrian regime's circumvention of international norms on the use of chemical weapons, the US twice utilized seapower to deliver cruise missile strikes against the regime's targets.

[13] Again, this goes back to the early days of the service. From the end of the Civil War to the start of the Spanish-American War, the Navy was "almost exclusively" engaged in maritime security operations. Swartz and McGrady, *A Deep Legacy*, 1, 11.

[14] Steven Metz, "The End of Grand Strategy: US Maritime Operations in the Twenty-First Century (Review)," *Naval War College Review* 72, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 2.

addition to the strategic logic of order maintenance, it is useful to analyze the topic here because the Navy has an obligation to be thoughtful about tasks it will be asked to perform.

There is little evidence that great power competition (short of major power war) will disrupt historical patterns of maritime security's role in order maintenance. In other periods, when the US was focused on defending the global order from fundamental challengers, the Navy continued to balance maritime security operations with preparations for great power war. For example, during the Cold War, the Navy perennially executed small-scale operations even while readying for a potential conflict with the Soviet Union. *That these operations did not produce a substantial effect on strategy or policy in that era is what should concern us most here.*[15] Despite being a dominant part of naval history, maritime security is often pursued as an annex to the dominant strategy, not logically derived from or connected to it.[16]

Implications for maritime security

Threats to the international order—particularly the longitudinal threats that work slowly in corroding the international order's normative dimension and against which the surface Navy is a uniquely useful combatant—can emanate from both great and lesser powers. In either case, the systemic benefits of serious corrosion redound to the benefit of rival great powers, making any substantive threat to the order relevant to great power competition.

The challenge, however, is that combating corrosion precipitated by great powers and lesser powers actually represents two different underlying approaches. Although they are not mutually exclusive in theory, in practice optimizing the Navy to address one type of competitor may mean a less optimal architecture to address the other (explored further below). This is especially the case when we recall the need for the Navy to bear the expense of preparing to execute the approach in quadrant 1—defeating a great power's frontal effort to revise the order (major power war).

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[15] Swartz and McGrady, *A Deep Legacy*, 11.

[16] A military's view of what it is and what it does is shaped not only by an assessment of the strategic environment, but also dynamics of bureaucratic positioning and historiography (the stories a service tells about itself). This is no doubt the case for the Navy, whose dominant intellectual tradition is marked by the "obvious blue-water preoccupations" of the Mahanian school (to quote Till's *Seapower*, 61). This blue-water disposition, and the type of fleet it produces, is reinforced by a concurrent intellectual de-emphasis of other forms of naval activity. As historian Benjamin Armstrong notes, the operational storytelling of the Navy has long been dominated by a particular focus on *guerre d'escadre* (fleet battles) and *guerre de course* (war on commerce), to the detriment of a third pillar of naval conflict equally stretching back to the founding of the USN—*guerre de razzia* (raiding effectively maritime security operations. See, Benjamin Armstrong, *Small Boats and Daring Men: Maritime Raiding, Irregular Warfare, and the Early American Navy* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 13.

Our framework shows us that competition, when understood generally as an axis of more or less intense levels of conflict, is insufficient to make informed judgments about maritime security in a period of GPC. Refining our understanding of competition using the framing of threats to the US-led order helps us clarify why maritime security matters. Such a refinement also leaves us focused clearly on two types of approaches: (1) combating the corrosive effects of great powers on the US-led order (quadrant 2, or "great power confrontation"), and (2) combating the corrosive effects of lesser powers on the US-led order (quadrant 3, or "lesser power management"). Hence it is useful to say a little more about both of these approaches before turning to what they mean for Navy policy.

Great power confrontation (quadrant 2) focuses on combating efforts by the great powers to weaken the international order. In the case of China, this would include taking aim at some of the more obvious issues such as island building and "salami-slicing" tactics in the South and East China Seas, where slow and deliberate efforts to revise concepts of regional maritime sovereignty are challenging international laws and norms and reinforcing efforts to establish different rules in China's "near-abroad." Russian activities in regional norm-breaking—for example, the violation of maritime rules in the 2018 Kerch Strait incident with Ukraine, part of its larger violations in Ukraine, or efforts to enforce strict sovereignty claims over the Northern Sea Route—represent similar order maintenance threats emanating from great powers. These powers are also active outside their neighborhoods. Chinese distant-water fishing fleets, heavily subsidized by the government, are frequent violators of international regulatory regimes and undermine core concepts of sovereignty and the rule of law. Periodic reports of unsafe and unprofessional maritime activities perpetrated by Russian naval assets likewise reflect worldwide violations of the "rules of the road."

The great power confrontation approach—focusing on these and other activities by rival great powers, including building strong narratives around US efforts to confront them—has the virtue of reflecting a prevalent concept in current US strategy: that less intense operations have a bearing on overall competition with great powers. Competition spectrums typically imply linkages between less intense operations and more intense ones. The details of those linkages are often unstated, and a focus on order maintenance helps connect individual types of operations by identifying a common strategic objective. The lack of overt linkages in strategy between less intense operations and overall objectives also makes it difficult to know what low-intensity operations would be most effective and toward what end (the gap that emerged from our first framework). Again, the order focus is helpful. In any specific instance, policymakers can evaluate the universe of maritime security options by applying a systemic filter—does this activity (alone or in aggregate) meaningfully reinforce core US stewardship of the order?

This depiction of competition as a continuum is particularly enduring in Navy strategy and may have specific salience in eras of great power tension. During such periods, strategies that focus
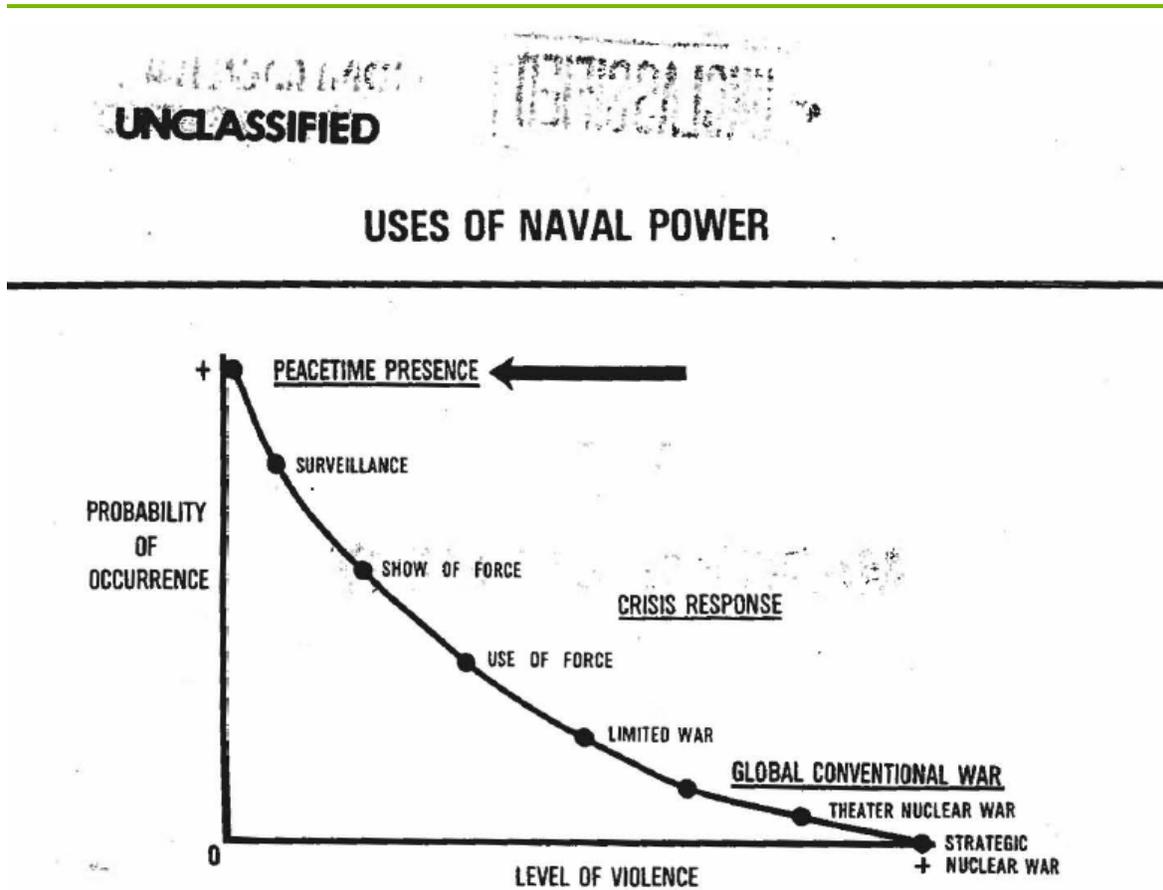
exclusively on high-intensity conflict present a challenge for the Navy, for which a constant deployment cycle sees the force participating in a diverse set of operations along the operational continuum. An analysis by Peter Swartz shows that seven Navy strategies between 1970 and 2010 utilized a spectrum of conflict as an organizing principle (Design 2.0 is the eighth).[17] The most well-known of these was the Maritime Strategy of the 1980s, which included a continuous slope connecting peacetime presence and nuclear war, inserted in part (per the recollections of one of the strategy's authors) to speak to the Navy's diverse commitments even in periods of great power competition (Figure 5).[18] The last strategy to utilize the spectrum framework before Design 2.0 came in 2003. The Navy strategies that guided 15 years of the global war on terror, by contrast, are organized around other constructs.[19]

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[17] Peter M. Swartz, *US Navy Capstone Strategies and Concepts (1970–2010): Comparisons, Contrasts, and Changes, Volume 1* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2011), 30.

[18] Author's conversation with Peter Swartz, October 3, 2019.

[19] Swartz, *US Navy Capstone Strategies and Concepts (1970–2010): Comparisons, Contrasts, and Changes, Volume 1,* 30.

Figure 5.   Uses of naval power—1984 Maritime Strategy

UNCLASSIFIED

USES OF NAVAL POWER

PEACETIME PRESENCE ←

PROBABILITY OF OCCURRENCE

SURVEILLANCE

SHOW OF FORCE

CRISIS RESPONSE

USE OF FORCE

LIMITED WAR

GLOBAL CONVENTIONAL WAR

THEATER NUCLEAR WAR

STRATEGIC NUCLEAR WAR

LEVEL OF VIOLENCE

(U) Before discussing the role of the Navy in a conventional global war, it must be emphasized that the Navy serves the U.S. government across the entire range of conflict possibilities: from peacetime presence through strategic nuclear war. While the strategy outlined here focuses on global conventional war, the Navy's role in it cannot be understood completely without some mention of other kinds of conflict. Therefore, it will initially focus briefly on the Navy's two other major roles: peacetime presence and crisis response.

Source: 1984 Maritime Strategy (OPNAV 60 P-1-84), 2 (Declassified).

Lesser power management (quadrant 3) focuses on combating the damage that less powerful competitors can wage on the international order. Consider, for example, North Korean efforts to evade United Nations Security Council sanctions. Or Iranian efforts to harass international shipping passing through the Strait of Hormuz. Or the Houthis' use of antiship cruise missiles

in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Or piracy along major East African sea routes. Lesser powers that are subject to international castigation often attempt to subvert or circumvent the rule of law, or simply aim to profit from a local deficit in enforcement capability. Failure to address these local manifestations of order corrosion, particularly in critical maritime regions, can broadly challenge the validity of prevailing international legal and security norms (in addition to threatening mariners' lives, increasing shipping costs, and so on). Considering both the role of shipping as a lifeblood of the global economic order and the somewhat voluntary nature of participation in the order, threats to commerce or the validity of the order's rules are cumulative (at sufficient scale) obstacles to US credibility as system manager.

An approach focused on managing lesser powers has its own advantages and also operates within the overarching framework of current policy guidance. Despite the overwhelming rhetorical pivot toward great power competition, existing strategy is more nuanced than much of the commentary would suggest. The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) summary does not use the phrase "great power competition," which arises only once in the White House's 2017 National Security Strategy. The NDS summary does note the need for continued attention to Iran, North Korea, and terrorism, just at levels that do not hold US forces hostage to these challengers. Incorporating these competitors into a larger strategic framework is thus consistent with national objectives. More urgently, building a framework to address these competitors through the lens of GPC is important in order to help mitigate self-destructive overreactions when lesser power provocations inevitably surface. To that end, the filter of how a provocation relates to order maintenance and core security norms is instructive.

A lesser power management approach is also consistent with general principles of balancing risk. Less powerful states may be able to do less acute harm to the United States, but they may also constitute likely points of friction, particularly if faced with opportunities to stake out gains while the US focuses on other powers. Consequently, the development of an approach that deliberately incorporates lesser powers into the broader architecture of great power competition could ensure that risks emanating from lesser powers neither overtake the focus on great powers nor disappear entirely in their wake.

A note on the global order

This paper discusses the international order in generalized terms. Before leaving this theory section and continuing on to implications for Navy policies, however, it is important to note that theorists are divided on how to characterize the extent of the international order or its

cohesion.[20] One recent exploration of the topic concludes that there are in fact eight distinct orders built around thematic issues such as trade, security, information, and so on.[21] Revisionist powers may seek to remake some of these orders, but not all. Moreover, analysts are divided on whether China or Russia are revisionist powers, or how an orientation toward revisionism would be applied by each power. As one analyst contends, "China is revisionist in the Asia-Pacific region, where Russia is a status quo power, and the inverse is true in Europe."[22] This paper's central thesis holds, regardless of China or Russia's perceived stance towards the order because it provides a framework for helping identify why the order is worthy of maintenance from a strategic perspective.

If the order is under less threat than some analysts contend, that is a positive, not a problematic, development. If the order is in fact threatened unevenly by the rival great powers, then operational recommendations for how and where the US should shore up the order could be heavily modified according to how leaders understand the most likely threats to the order, and from which powers they arise. The Arctic offers an example. In that region, Russia is generally a status quo power, advantaged as it is by existing institutions and norms (though a changing climate has resulted in Russia bending norms on maritime transit around the Northern Sea Route). Meanwhile, China may become an increasingly revisionist power in the Arctic, where the country has growing economic, scientific, and strategic equities but relatively little influence on existing rules and governance structures.

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[20] A 2016 RAND report on the international order provides some useful background on this point. Michael Mazarr, Miranda Priebe, Andrew Radin, and Astrid Stuth Cevallos, *Understanding the Current International Order* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), 7, file:///C:/Users/tallisj/Downloads/RAND_RR1598.pdf.

[21] Alastair Iain Johnston, "China in a World of Orders: Rethinking Compliance and Challenge in Beijings International Relations," *International Security* 44, Issue 2 (Fall 2019): 9–69. See also Bordner, "Rethinking Neorealist Theory."

[22] Michael Kofman, "Towards a Sino-Russian entente?" Riddle, November 20, 2019, https://www.ridl.io/en/towards-a-sino-russian-entente/.

Navy Policies in Pursuit of Strategy

The previous section described two approaches that characterize the relationship between maritime security and great power competition. While not mutually exclusive, the two approaches manifest different recommendations for where the Navy goes, what it buys, and what it does. As part of examining the two approaches' implications, it is useful to first describe relevant Navy policy areas and their relationship to maritime security operations and capabilities.

The present section borrows elements from a 1998 study by the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) to help the Navy consider how it might adapt to the needs of maritime security operations in the context of the post–Cold War decline in great power competition.[23] Our paper addresses almost the inverse condition—how the US may adapt to maritime security demands given the revitalization of more competitive great power dynamics. Although the context is inverted, the 1998 study's analytic framework provides a useful structure for tackling our questions regarding the relationship between maritime security, strategy, and policy.

Militaries can adapt to strategic changes in myriad ways, and so identifying specific areas of prospective policy change is important for scoping a study and for delivering the appropriate findings. These categories of analysis can include evolutions in declaratory policy, budget policy, personnel policy, and more. The CNA study identified four areas of policy with respect to the Navy: deployment, procurement, employment, and organization:

- *Deployment* is where forces are placed and according to what strategic rationale
- *Procurement* is what the Navy buys
- *Employment* is how forces are actually used
- *Organization* is how fleets are structured and relevant lines of command and control.

As we will see below, three of these areas are potentially readily responsive to the strategic environment and well within Navy authorities to modify (either from the Department of the Navy for staff, train, and equip functions, or the component commands for operational issues). The fourth policy area, organization, is more complicated and less responsive to strategy; hence it is excluded from this analysis.[24]

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[23] Swartz and McGrady, *A Deep Legacy*.

[24] Organization is historically tied to policy, law, and the size of the Navy than it is to strategic context or deployment, employment, and procurement models according to Swartz and McGrady's analysis. Swartz and McGrady, *A Deep Legacy*, 34.

Deployment: Where the Navy goes

Prior analysis has identified five models that describe historical US Navy deployment postures. These models represent fleet and national equities as manifest in the places the Navy located its assets and for what overall intent: combat surge; combat forward; contingency forward; multi-mission and multi-area, separate fleets; and multi-mission and multi-area, mixed fleets.[25]

In periods of **combat surge**—predominantly the earlier portion of the Navy's history until the Barbary Wars—the majority of the force was held in reserve near the continental United States in preparation for wartime. This posture produced virtually no maritime security activities, in large part because the fleet was held (or laid up) in US ports.[26] Following conceptually from that combat surge posture is the **combat forward** model, where the fleet is actually engaged in fighting a conflict. This posture represents some of the most familiar periods in American naval history, including the Civil War and World War II, and likewise included very few examples of maritime security operations given an overall focus on major operations.[27]

On the opposite end of the spectrum from wartime is the **contingency forward** model, where the fleet is stationed overseas with almost no focus on powerful threats and where the predominant focus is on maritime security operations. For a historical analogy, consider much of the Navy's deployment posture through the 19th century, a period that saw less high-end conflict and marked more by expanding American equities in overseas dominions.[28]

The final two deployment models depict fleets prepared for both ends of the conflict spectrum, but in different ways. A **multi-mission, multi-area, separated fleet** construct is one that results in small squadrons deployed forward and engaged in maritime security tasking with a warfighting squadron held in reserve.[29] Historical analogs include the Navy just prior to both

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[25] Ibid., 19–20.

[26] Ian Toll chronicles the dynamics that resulted in consistent mothballing of the fleet in the earliest portion of the US Navy's history. See his *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the US Navy* (New York: Norton, 2006),

[27] Swartz and McGrady, *A Deep Legacy*, 19–20. This analysis excludes an assessment of how maritime security operations may contribute to an active major power conflict. Moreover, some analysis suggests that lower-end missions (like riverine operations) are trending further to the periphery of larger conflicts as kinetic operations become more precise and dependent on air power. See Kevin Rowlands, "Riverine Warfare," *Naval War College Review* 71, no. 1 (Winter 2018).

[28] Swartz and McGrady, *A Deep Legacy*, 20–21.

[29] In a 2002 working paper, Peter Swartz describes this model as "separate tailored fleets: experiment in strength at home, but do some forward MOOTW," which corresponds to the Navy's deployment pattern between 1914–1917, 1919–1937, and 1945–1947. Peter M. Swartz, *Sea Changes: Transforming US Navy Deployment Strategy, 1775–2002* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2002), 119.

the First and Second World Wars. Alternatively, a **multi-mission, multi-area, combined fleet** construct results in battle-capable fleets forward-deployed that are concurrently responsible for tasking at all levels of competition.[30] This template predominated during the Cold War and became the default conceptual model for several generations of naval officers and strategists.[31] The model was responsible for executing nearly two decades of counterterror and counterinsurgency operations, demonstrating that multi-mission platforms can readily support the technical kinetic demands of combat against lesser powers.

These models provide useful constructs for considering how today's strategic needs can be met through the context of deployment policy. To that end, the summary NDS affords us some additional insight into how DOD is translating strategy into a deployment model fit for GPC. The document summarizes a fourfold layering of capabilities deployed to defend the nation and national interests: contact, blunt, surge, and homeland forces. The contact force is focused on competing below the level of armed conflict. The blunt layer is designed to "delay, degrade, or deny" aggression and thus represents a transitional force between maritime security (in the naval context) and higher-end conflict. The surge layer is the "war-winning" force, and the homeland component insulates the United States proper from adversary threats.[32] However, there is no further description of what these layers mean for deployment models. Thus we are left with the outlines of a deployment construct but few details of how it applies in practice.

Procurement: What the Navy buys

Despite the rhetorical emphasis on high-intensity conflict, rarely in the nation's history has the Navy purchased ships designed exclusively for major warfighting. Only during times of war or in the lead-up to impending conflicts—when the force is distinguished by an abundance of specialized hulls designed for specialized (i.e., warfighting) operations—has the Navy largely pursued such a narrow procurement plan.[33]

Procurement models can be conceptually linked to deployment models in more than just the combat scenario. The contingency-forward model, for example, was bolstered by a procurement approach that prioritized specialized construction of lower-end capabilities for

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[30] Swartz later refers to this model as "combat-credible forward presence in hubs," which corresponds to the Navy's deployment pattern since 1948. Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 114.

[31] Swartz and McGrady, *A Deep Legacy*, 20–21.

[32] *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: DOD, 2018), 7.

[33] Swartz and McGrady, *A Deep Legacy*, 2, 26–27.

employment in specialized (this time, maritime security) operations. Meanwhile, the multi-mission, multi-area, separated fleet deployment model can be supported by the procurement of mission-specific platforms, with high-end and low-end vessels supporting differentiated squadrons with differentiated requirements. However, as the CNA study notes, deployment models have not always mapped well to procurement policy in practice.[34]

Finally, just as the multi-mission, multi-area, combined force is the most familiar deployment model for contemporary audiences, so too is its related procurement model most familiar: a program of specialized constructions (high-end warfighting platforms) employed for mixed operational use. Although warships under this procurement model are often capable of operating across many levels of competition, across history the corresponding force structure is also occasionally augmented through the purchase of supplemental maritime security assets to provide added capability at lower levels of conflict or in disparate regions.[35] The Littoral Combat Ship (LCS), high-speed vessels, and expeditionary sea bases (ESBs) are examples of purpose-built craft that exist somewhat outside of the traditional contemporary fleet construct. This departure has notable implications, explored later, for how the Navy can utilize dedicated low-end assets even in a fleet architecture designed predominantly around the multifunction employment of high-end platforms.

Employment: What the Navy does

There are also myriad ways to consider the question of what the Navy should do once deployed to a given region. One of those ways is *readiness*, which presently carries the most currency, since what the Navy does on a daily basis is frequently assessed with the paradigm of what it is or is not prepared to do in the near future. Two pertinent questions arise regarding readiness and maritime security in an era of GPC. First, does execution of maritime security operations diminish the readiness needed to deter or execute great power war? And second, does preparation for great power war reduce readiness for maritime security operations?[36]

Readiness is a difficult issue to parse, and this paper is not the appropriate venue for such a detailed exploration. Previous CNA work, however, has found that transitioning from a maritime security focus to a war footing has not been fundamentally problematic in the past. In the Navy's deep history, leaders aggregated a wartime force out of a predominantly maritime security Navy in 1846, 1861, and 1898, with war scares prior to the Mexican-

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[34] Ibid., 26–27, 34.

[35] Ibid., 26.

[36] Ibid., 125.

American and Spanish-American Wars helping to accelerate two of those transitions.[37] The Navy has not built a predominantly maritime security force of late, and thus the existence of the raw material for a functional wartime force has significantly minimized the cost of transition. For example, Swartz and McGrady conclude that during the Cold War, maritime security operations like the Middle East Force did not detract from war planning or combat in Korea and Vietnam. Overall, it is far from clear that maritime security operations inevitably detract from high-end readiness.[38]

The converse is clearer: maritime security often involves unique operational requirements that may not simply be lesser-included cases of preparing for larger-scale conflicts.[39] For example, the platforms needed to prevail in higher-end contingencies are sometimes inappropriate for low-end missions. Naval historian Benjamin Armstrong chronicles several instances in the Navy's deep history of deployed naval forces acquiring small, shallow-draft vessels for littoral operations in order to compensate for the oversized frigates they had on hand (and which they often needed in order to arrive at distant stations).[40] Even small platforms built during eras of higher-end conflict (like coastal craft in the Civil War[41]) can fail to transition effectively to other types of maritime security operations, optimized as they were for amphibious operations or blockades.[42] *As a baseline, we can assert that preparedness for higher-intensity operations does not preclude, but also does not inherently produce, readiness for maritime security operations.*

Another challenge to consider with respect to employment and readiness is the contingencies to which sailors train. The multi-mission, multi-area, combined fleet model means that the same platforms and crews may shift from one level of competition to another on the same deployment. Assuming sailors train to the most intense threats, is it fair to regard maritime security as lesser-included training cases? The answer may lie in the goal of the maritime security operation being undertaken. Military support functions—such as providing security, assured communications, transportation, or logistics—are likely to transfer well. Nonmilitary functions such as diplomacy or civil affairs may be lacking among crews trained to major contingencies. Two decades of challenges implementing these types of functions in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrate just how conceptually and technically demanding such functions can

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[37] Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 21–22, 28.

[38] Swartz and McGrady, *A Deep Legacy*, 126–127.

[39] Joshua Tallis, *The War for Muddy Waters: Pirates, Terrorists, Traffickers, and Maritime Insecurity* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019).

[40] Armstrong, *Small Boats and Daring Men*.

[41] Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 22.

[42] Swartz and McGrady, *A Deep Legacy*, 127.

be. In sum, maritime security may be a lesser-included case for training with greatest confidence "when the mission is a warfighting mission."[43] Otherwise, even capable crews on capable platforms may be stymied by lack of readiness.

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[43] Ibid., 128–129.

Policy Implications of New Strategic Approaches

Having designed a framework for understanding the roles of maritime security in strategy, and then having identified some core areas of naval policy that strategy can inform, we can now consider what this means for managing strategic investments and divestments for maritime security in an era of GPC. We explore these implications according to the two relevant strategic orientations delineated by our framework: great power confrontation and lesser power management.

Great power confrontation

Deploying the fleet to focus specifically on China and Russia reflects the prioritization of regions where the two countries' navies are most active. For China, that is the Western Pacific Ocean. For Russia, maritime hotspots include the Mediterranean, the High North, and the Baltic and Black Seas. Across the South and East China Seas, Chinese irregular and constabulary maritime forces[44] engage in gray-zone campaigns[45] and salami-slicing tactics that are having corrosive effects on international law and maritime security norms. Meanwhile, Russia has operationalized its role as spoiler, most acutely in the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea,[46] where Moscow endeavors to carve out spheres of influence.[47] It is in these contested regions where competition with great powers risks spanning the entire operational spectrum, from low-end operations up to great power conflict. In these areas of operation, the Navy must be

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[44] Andrew Erickson and Connor M. Kennedy, "Irregular Forces at Sea: Not 'Merely Fishermen'—Shedding Light on China's Maritime Militia," Center for International Maritime Security, November 2, 2015, http://cimsec.org/new-cimsec-series-on-irregular-forces-at-sea-not-merely-fishermen-shedding-light-on-chinas-maritime-militia/19624.

[45] See, for example, *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations,* ed. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019).

[46] See, for example, "Welcome to Russia's Hybrid War in the Sea of Azov," *The National Interest*, December 29, 2018, https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/welcome-russias-hybrid-war-sea-azov-40122.

[47] Concerns about future competition between the US, its allies, and Russia in the Arctic are also best viewed through the analytic lens of system maintenance. Should Russia become a truly revisionist power in the Arctic, efforts to corrode norms to its benefit—including further contestation over the legal status of the Northern Sea Route—have implications for overall adherence to the rule of law at sea, with reverberations in other strategically important regions such as the South China Sea.

prepared to execute the most sophisticated forms of warfare while also engaging in sustained low-end competition.

The strategic decision to confront great power efforts to degrade or revise the international order places a premium on deploying the surface fleet near competitor's strategic centers of gravity and maintaining preparedness to execute both low- and high-end missions. An approach of maritime order maintenance in a GPC environment would suggest a force construct capable of operating at multiple levels of competition and managing the risks of rapid changes in the threat environment. The historical US Navy deployment model most appropriate for this strategy is a multi-mission, multi-area, mixed fleet with high-end combatants (e.g., destroyers, cruisers, aircraft carriers).[48]

Not coincidentally, a multi-mission fleet deployed in greatest concentration near China and Russia and prepared to compete at multiple levels of competition is close to the model the Navy operates today (Figure 6). A notable exception is the current heavy footprint of Middle East operations and demands for carrier or amphibious presence in the Persian Gulf. This reduces the prospective cost of transition to a great power confrontation approach (compared to other approaches).

Figure 6.   Multi-mission, multi-area, combined fleet (today's Navy)
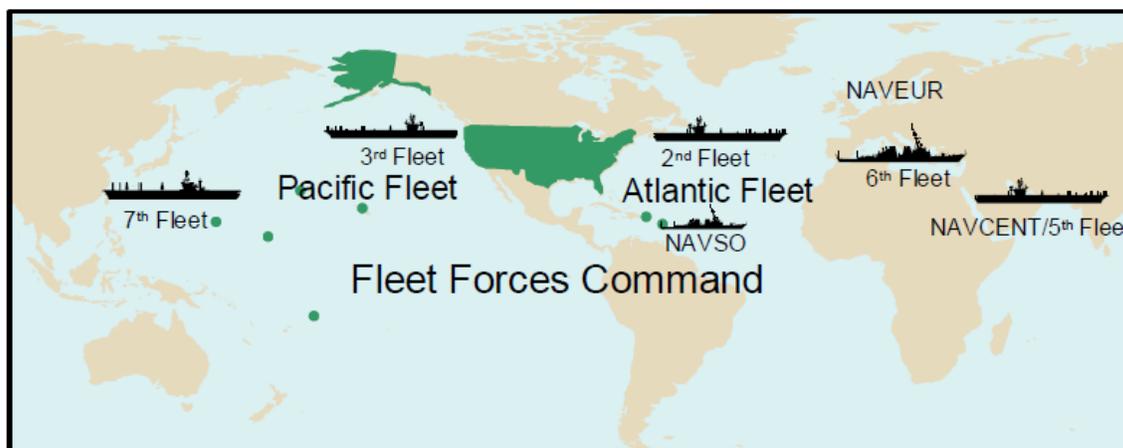
Source: Peter M. Swartz, *Sea Changes: Transforming US Navy Deployment Strategy, 1775–2002* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2002), 115.

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[48] Swartz describes this fleet model in more detail in *Sea Changes*, 114.

Viewing today's Navy deployment model in terms of a multi-mission, multi-area, mixed fleet also clarifies that the Navy's forward forces—the same forces that would be responsible for great power war—are the predominant assets available to compete at all the attendant lower levels of conflict. If policymakers truly anticipate competing with great powers at these lower levels while employing a mixed-use fleet optimized for warfighting, they must also acknowledge that high-end assets will often be the primary tools for executing order maintenance missions. Consequently, the Navy must update its assessment of readiness to capture more nuance in maritime security operations. Do all types of order maintenance missions degrade readiness for high-end contingencies? Even if they do, is there enough value in some order maintenance operations that makes it practical to expend some readiness in the short term to achieve longer-term competitive objectives (such as *reinforcing* the order)? Failing to answer employment questions and their relationship to readiness will erode policymakers' willingness to execute order maintenance tasks. The result would be an approach that rhetorically acknowledges the need to compete with great powers at all levels but practically focuses at the predominant wartime end of the spectrum.

Given the similarity of the multi-mission, multi-area, mixed-fleet model to that of today's Navy, a great power confrontation approach also does not require the adoption of a radically different procurement model. Still, as noted, this deployment model has historically required occasional augmentation with dedicated maritime security capabilities to provide tailored or cost-effective adjuncts to the fleet. If the force intends to compete with rising Chinese and Russian influence near their centers of gravity as well as in regions further afield,[49] greater procurement of maritime security-tailored platforms will be needed. Effective *and cost-effective* competition may necessitate the use of smaller or less sophisticated assets than destroyers and amphibious platforms, particularly in peripheral areas of operation, where the likelihood of high-end conflict is low. Patrol boats, littoral craft, riverine forces, converted merchant craft, expeditionary platforms, and constabulary capabilities (e.g., counterpiracy and counterterrorism) may be particularly valuable for enforcing core system norms in waters surrounding Africa, Latin America, and the Indian Ocean.

Yet even a multi-area fleet cannot be everywhere. Nor should it. Adjunct, transferable maritime security capabilities offer a means to enforce norms and compete with Chinese- and Russian-facilitated rules evasion in regions like the Gulf of Guinea, South Asia, or the Caribbean without diluting the forces responsible for competing at all levels in the South China Sea and the Mediterranean. These adjunct assets could be rotated as needed to various secondary locations

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[49] As just one example, Chinese and Russian activities in Latin America are a growing challenge. Although much of the competition in this arena is economic, commentators note the importance of maritime competition in the Western Hemisphere, where China and Russia have sought weapons agreements and deployed limited forces in the last several years. Andrew Kramer, "In Latin America, the Price of US Neglect Is High," *Proceedings* 145 (June 2019), https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2019/june/latin-america-price-us-neglect-high.

in a model similar to the one the Navy Expeditionary Combat Command (NECC) uses to deliver riverine or construction squadrons forward with limited permanent overseas stations. NECC could also be a natural fit to serve as a global clearinghouse to match Navy Component Command requests for maritime security forces combating the corrosive effects of great powers. *This would ensure that limited maritime security forces were delivered to locations and for missions with an explicit connection to both great power competitors and their actions against the US-led order.* A potentially costlier option would be resurrecting forward stations in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and parts of the Indian Ocean. However small, stations build relationships and trust that facilitate local access and signal an enduring US commitment to regional allies and partners; they could also serve as a useful, low-cost deployment and employment template for platforms such as the LCS or ESB.

The role of unmanned systems in a great power confrontation approach warrants consideration. Recent fleet architecture studies, such as the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments' (CSBA) 2017 analysis, often describe the utility of unmanned systems in great power conflict. Unmanned vehicles can serve as spotters or shooters, diversifying communications options, enhancing targeting accuracy and battle damage assessments, distributing a greater number of missiles across a broader array of platforms, and enabling the Navy to operate lethal assets inside an adversary's weapons engagement zone (WEZ) without unduly jeopardizing high-end assets. To that end, the CSBA study ultimately calls for 40 extra-large unmanned surface vessels, 40 extra-large unmanned underwater vehicles, and 14 detachments (with three aircraft a piece) of MQ-4 high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aircraft systems (UAS).[50] An emphasis on larger unmanned assets is also central to the Navy's ambitions to achieve a 355-ship Navy.[51]

While unmanned assets help alleviate fundamental challenges in great power anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities, maritime security operations will continue to require a human touch. Gray-zone tactics—island building, resource exploitation in other states' exclusive economic zones, leveraging merchant, irregular, and constabulary forces—may be most effectively combated by manned vessels. Efforts like fisheries patrols[52] are ineffectual without a human presence for law enforcement, and it seems likely that freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) would be less politically salient if performed by a robot flying the flag.

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[50] Bryan Clark, Peter Haynes, Bryan McGrath, Craig Hooper, Jesse Sloman, and Timothy A. Walton, *Restoring American Seapower: A New Fleet Architecture for the United States Navy* (Washington, DC: CSBA, 2017), https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA6224-Fleet_Architecture_Study_WEB.pdf.

[51] David Larter, "Acting US Navy secretary: Deliver me a 355-ship fleet by 2030," *Defense News*, December 9, 2019, https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2019/12/09/acting-us-navy-secretary-deliver-me-a-355-ship-fleet-by-2030/.

[52] For example, the Oceania Maritime Security Initiative (OMSI), as described in Danny Kelley, "USS Michael Murphy to Begin OMSI," US Navy, February 6, 2017, https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=98733.

Crewed platforms signal resolve better than do their unmanned counterparts in part because effective signaling must have potential costs to be credible. *Thus, perhaps counterintuitively, any cost savings (in dollars or personnel) derived from the role of unmanned assets for the high-end fight present a potential opportunity to invest more in the crewed platforms that facilitate order management.*

Lesser power management

Deploying the fleet primarily to manage lesser powers' efforts to corrode the international order would result in a different force laydown compared to the great power confrontation framework, which focuses explicitly on competing with China and Russia up and down the competitive spectrum. *In an approach of lesser power management, maritime forces are directed against a broader range of geographically dispersed competitors and with the persistent risk of unanticipated new actors (e.g., the rise of ISIS). This approach does not eliminate the predominant focus in the NDS and Navy strategy on great powers and thus must also account for the need to deliver credible combat power against China and Russia.*

What emerges, based on the template of earlier USN deployment models and the stated need to be prepared for both high- and low-end operations, is a best fit with the multi-mission, multi-area, separated fleet (Figure 7). This model has proved durable in the Navy's deep history and earlier iterations of competitive great power relations. Such was the case at the start of the 19th century, when a fleet of coastal vessels in the Gulf of Mexico focused on countering small contingencies even as the US squared off against the era's greatest power in the War of 1812. Into the Industrial Age, a US-based warfighting fleet, held in reserve while smaller units operated abroad, was the predominant model prior to World War I and before and immediately after World War II.[53]

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[53] Swartz and McGrady, *A Deep Legacy*, 64.

Figure 7.   Multi-mission, multi-area, separated fleet (the interwar Navy)

Source: Peter M. Swartz, *Sea Changes: Transforming US Navy Deployment Strategy, 1775–2002* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2002), 119.

It is useful to think of a multi-mission, multi-area, separate fleet in two parts: the warfighting component and the maritime security component.[54] When considering dispersal of this fleet construct, the maritime security force laydown is focused on distributing low-end combat power and enforcing the norms of the order in regions where smaller contingencies may emerge from any number of competitors. The employment rationale behind the deployment of maritime security forces would encourage the stationing of contact forces (to use the NDS's terminology) in regions where contingencies are likely to emerge and more robust blunt forces where prominent (but not necessarily great) powers require further deterrence.

In contrast to the great power confrontation model, a deployment/employment approach predicated on lesser power management would invite a continued naval presence across the Middle East (including the Eastern Mediterranean), where persistent breaches of international law has proven problematic (e.g., Houthi missile attacks, Syrian chemical weapons use, alleged Iranian attacks on oil tankers). This force would not be the main warfighting fleet but would be larger and more capable than the small maritime security augments that were described as part of the great power confrontation approach. These forces would be prepared to engage in sustained operations that enforce the validity of the US-led order, including deterring Iranian nuclear proliferation, countering piracy, and targeting extremist organizations in the Persian Gulf, the Levant, the Horn of Africa, and North Africa.

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[54] Swartz additionally describes these fleets in *Sea Changes*, 119.

Other than the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean, stations of permanent, moderate-scale order management forces may fit well in the Sea of Japan or East China Sea (blockading or managing North Korea) and the Gulf of Guinea (with regard to terrorism in East Africa). Yet even in a construct where the warfighting fleet is garrisoned in the continental US, it is unlikely that stations can be erected everywhere. Consequently, pursuing an approach to combat corrosive effects on the international order precipitated by a diverse set of actors at the lower end of the threat spectrum would likely result in lost capacity to compete with China and Russia in as many locations as possible. In other words, buying capable maritime security fleet stations in regions such as the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean, the Horn of Africa, and the Gulf of Guinea may require limited or no presence in regions such as Latin America, given the paucity of terrorist or state threats to the US emanating from the region. This is a direct opportunity cost (economic and otherwise) when compared to Chinese and Russian activity in some of these regions, but it is a natural consequence of a lesser power management orientation to maritime security. The framing of competitors and how they intersect with competition thus clearly raises some points of divergent policy preference.

With respect to the warfighting fleet component, a traditional version of this model's force laydown has the fleet garrisoned in home waters, potentially conducting training and experimentation to prepare for high-end conflict. The interwar Navy is an example of this deployment variant in practice. Yet it is conceivable that the warfighting fleet may be garrisoned among a small number of select hubs—for example, the US East Coast, West Coast, Hawaii, and Japan. The salient factor in distinguishing this laydown from the current force is how it would be used—that is, consistent with the logic behind having separate, not combined, fleets. The warfighting component, whether centrally garrisoned or dispersed among major nodes, would not be responsible for day-to-day order management operations. Rather, the force's responsibility would be to train for, deter, and, if need be, win great power wars. In the rubrics of the NDS, this fleet constitutes the surge and homeland defense layers, forces that are dedicated to major conflict and thus are not responsible for order maintenance. Consequently, whether deployed exclusively in the continental US or globally, the warfighting component is employed in a much more selective manner than today's mixed-use combined fleet.

The procurement model designed to support a force divided between a warfighting fleet and a maritime security fleet would optimally reflect the logic behind differentiated deployment and employment forces. Sourcing assets to support stations that are dedicated to order maintenance tasks for less powerful rivals would enable the Navy to buy or divert assets that do not need to survive in highly kinetic environments. Such sourcing opens the procurement window to less expensive platforms, older platforms, or niche acquisitions such as station ships and auxiliaries. Procurement for the lesser power management approach thus includes a composite of sourcing vessels that are ill suited for major warfighting but well suited for small-scale operations.

The interwar Navy again offers an example. While the warfighting fleet trained in home waters, tailored lower-end forces conducted order maintenance operations as part of the Asiatic Fleet and the Caribbean Special Service Squadron, which typified the myriad platforms capable of supporting the maritime security fleet. Station assets included versatile but often outdated platforms that were no longer fit for major operations. Squadrons also included some purpose-built platforms for maritime security missions such as gunboats and station ships.[55] Occasionally, these categories overlapped, as with the USS *Scorpion*, a retrofitted civilian yacht that served for nearly 30 years as a station ship in Turkey providing (variously) for humanitarian and diplomatic missions.[56] Station ships are a particularly notable potential procurement item for this type of federated fleet deployment model, and one not well represented in today's Navy other than through a handful of expeditionary sea bases and two aging command ships. Station ships and auxiliaries historically served as command and control nodes, floating diplomatic facilities, and occasionally the main instrument of coercion for small squadrons.

Recent history also offers a clue as to the prospective role of unmanned systems, which can greatly expand the Navy's global footprint to significant effect at low cost if they coalesce around a lesser power management approach. The ubiquitous unmanned combat aircraft providing persistent surveillance and limited strike options in counterterror and counterpiracy operations from the Horn of Africa to Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, and elsewhere underscore the utility of unmanned assets in cost-effective order maintenance responsibilities. Unmanned assets can likely contribute to an even wider set of such tasks, including sanctions enforcement or the detection of mass human rights violations. Unmanned systems are not without their costs, though. First, many maritime security requirements are best met with "humans in the loop." Humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HADR), noncombatant evacuations, security cooperation, and partner reassurance will likely remain interpersonal by nature. Second, an overreliance on unmanned systems can create new norms or break existing ones, which may undermine the broader enterprise of reinforcing the core rules of the international order. Thus procurement of unmanned systems for lesser power management facilitates the approach's distributed deployment model but faces complicated dynamics in employment.

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[55] Swartz and McGrady, *A Deep Legacy*, 99.

[56] Ibid., 110.

Findings and Recommendations

This study began with the question of how maritime security relates to the Navy's needs in an era of great power competition. To answer that question, we built a framework suggesting that maritime security is integral to GPC when we understand competition as a battle to shape the underlying rules, institutions, and norms of the global order. In framing the issue this way, we are left with two approaches for maritime security: (1) combating the corrosive effects on the US-led international order perpetrated by rival great powers, and (2) combating such corrosive effects perpetrated by lesser powers. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive in theory but they do suggest different Navy policies for deployment, procurement, and employment.

In an assessment of the great power confrontation approach, we found the following:

- A multi-mission, multi-area, mixed-fleet deployment model best fits the framework. This approach consequently faces low barriers to execution for deployment and procurement policy, as both are similar to current Navy policy.

- This is not to say that some modifications would not improve the approach's execution. For example, existing procurement policy would benefit from adjunct, low-cost, geographically transferable maritime security capabilities, whether adjudicated from a central location (likely at lower cost) or distributed to permanent stations (likely at higher cost).

- Likewise, employment of high-end forces for order maintenance missions is critical to the execution of a great power confrontation approach, but requires a more informed assessment of the relationship between readiness and the intent and efficacy of order maintenance operations.

- Perhaps the greatest deviation from current structures would be a relative de-emphasis on the heavy footprint built on multi-mission high-end assets in the Middle East, which is inconsistent with a great power confrontation approach.

These findings yield some initial recommendations:

- First, augment the mixed-use fleet with less expensive, dedicated maritime security assets (e.g., platforms such as the LCS, as well as "de-platformed" capabilities such as construction battalions) intended for capacity building and partner engagement in regions outside major fleet concentrations.

- Second, formalize a global clearinghouse for matching low-end requests for forces against the requirements of order maintenance in a great power confrontation approach to distribute limited resources cost-effectively.

- Third, consider resurrecting fleet stations with low-cost assets and minimal staffs in regions outside major fleet concentrations, enforcing core international norms and trust in the US held at risk by Chinese or Russian actions while minimizing the need to divert deployments of larger multi-mission assets.

Our assessment of a lesser power management approach yielded different findings, including the following:

- A multi-mission, multi-area, separate fleet model best fits this approach. This deployment model can capitalize on the infrastructure of existing areas of fleet concentration, but (as in the great power confrontation approach) comparatively less preexisting infrastructure is available to support the forward distribution of (in this case larger) moderate-size stations for the model's maritime security force.

- We also found that the Navy's current procurement policy supports the acquisition of the warfighting force.

- The maritime security force is atypical, procurement for which would require a composite of vessels that are ill suited for major warfighting but well suited for small-scale operations. This would require creating a different process for assessing and acquiring (or reapportioning) assets with different operational and survivability requirements than the warfighting fleet.

- Regarding employment, the separate fleet model would require a more judicious use of high-end forces, coupled with a greater willingness to build and employ a larger cadre of lower-end platforms for order maintenance requirements.

- Finally, a substantive naval footprint built on a maritime security force of moderate scale in the Middle East is consistent with (even central to) a lesser power management approach, given the density of actors threatening core order norms in the region.

Policymakers committed to this line of order management should consider the following:

- First, given the larger force rebalance this approach envisions, analysts must begin by identifying the scale of a maritime security force the Navy can afford and match the number and size of forward stations accordingly, prioritizing the Middle East.

- Second, design an acquisition process separate from the warfighting fleet to ensure lowest possible costs when sourcing platforms for the maritime security fleet. Assets should include older platforms (to help achieve scale) and purpose-built or higher-end capabilities according to the specific needs of a station.

- Third, identify the different command and control frameworks for managing the warfighting and maritime security fleets to ensure that both are used (or unused) as

intended. Consider how station ships can contribute to these distinct command and control frameworks.

It is difficult to claim that one role for maritime security is more important based on our analysis. Still, policy iteration does not take place in a vacuum. Although we have elucidated two distinct approaches for the role of maritime security in GPC, policymakers assess strategy and force structure with the pen already on the page. For that reason, the Navy's most pressing interest is and will likely remain aligned with the great power confrontation approach. Consequently, the policy positions that support a campaign of great power confrontation will probably predominate. However, even if the Navy does not optimize policy for less powerful competitors, the force will continue to engage in activities to counter them. Thus it advantages the Navy to adopt a framework of order maintenance because it offers a clear strategic discourse that demonstrates that all maritime security activities integrate with GPC when the prize is properly understood as control and management of the international order.

Figures

Abbreviations

A2/AD	Anti-access/area-denial
CSBA	Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments
DOD	Department of Defense
ESB	Expeditionary sea base
FONOPS	Freedom of navigation operations
GPC	Great power competition
HADR	Humanitarian assistance/disaster relief
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LCS	Littoral Combat Ship
M/OOTW	Military/operations other than war
NECC	Navy Expeditionary Combat Command
NDS	National Defense Strategy
OMSI	Oceania Maritime Security Initiative
SSC	Smaller-scale contingencies
UAS	Unmanned aircraft system

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