

'TIPPING' THE FUTURE FLEET



Official U. S. Navy Photograph
THE SIXTH FLEET IN THE MEDITERRANEAN—IMPLEMENTING THE U. S. NAVY'S FIRST WORLD WAR II STRATEGIC CONCEPT
Powering deep into the "World Island," the Mediterranean provides an unusually dramatic example of the possible theater of operations of a transoceanic navy.
In this above photograph, the destroyer Gearing is shown leading from the cruiser, *Arcton*. Also seen are the "USS *Ham* (BB-3) Sixth Fleet."

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NATIONAL POLICY AND THE "TRANSOCEANIC NAVY"

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I

THE ELEMENTS OF A MILITARY SERVICE

THE FUNDAMENTAL element of a military service is its purpose or role in implementing national policy. The statement of this role may be called the *strategic concept* of the service. Basically, this concept is a description of how, when, and where the military service expects to protect the nation against some threat to its security. If a military service does not possess such a concept, it becomes purposeless and confusing goals, and ultimately suffers both physical and moral degeneration. A military service may at times, of course, perform functions unrelated to external security, such as internal policing, disaster relief, and citizenship training. These are, however, subordinate and collateral responsibilities. A military service does not exist to perform these functions; rather it performs these functions because it has already been called into existence by its threat to the national security. A service is many things: it is men, weapons, bases, equipment, traditions, organization. But none of these have meaning or usefulness unless there is a unifying purpose which shapes and directs their relations and activities towards the achievement of some goal of national policy.

A second element of a military service is

the resources, human and material, are required to implement its strategic concept. To secure these resources it is for society to forego the alternative which these resources might be put to use in. Thus, the resources which a service acquires in their allocation to the service. Thus, the resources which a service is able to obtain in a democratic society are a function of the *public support* of that service. The service has the responsibility to obtain this necessary support, and it can do this if it possesses a strategic concept which clearly formulates its relationship to national security. Hence this second element of public support is, in the long run, dependent upon the strategic concept of the service. If a service does not possess a defined strategic concept, the public and political leaders will be confused as to the role of the service, uncertain as to the necessity of its existence, and apathetic or hostile to the claims made by the service upon its resources of society.

Organizational structure is the third element of a military service. For given the first two elements, it becomes necessary to group the resources allocated by society in such a manner as most effectively to implement the strategic concept. Thus the nature of the organization likewise is dependent upon the nature of the strategic concept. Hence there is no such thing as the ideal form of military organization. The type of organization which may be appropriate for

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By Captain George Galdorisi, U.S. Navy (Retired), Antonio Siordia, and Scott C. Truver

The course ahead for the Navy of the mid-21st century is still uncharted. The strategic alternative it chooses now will chart that course, for better or worse.

In late 2009 Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Gary Roughead asked the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) to evaluate the characteristics of a globally influential navy and address the “tipping point” at which the U.S. Navy would cease to be globally influential.¹ While CNA suggested that a Navy of fewer ships than today’s Fleet of roughly 285 hulls could still generate a modicum of global maritime dominance, the potential is great for tomorrow’s Fleet to be the “Royal Navy” of the mid-21st century unless current trends are reversed. What could a future U.S. Navy of, say, only 140 warships do?

“The Navy at a Tipping Point: Maritime Dominance at Stake” study has sparked a spirited debate within the Navy, Department of Defense, Congress, think-tanks, and numerous blogs regarding CNA’s five alternative futures for the Navy and the nation. But even as the conversations wax and wane, prevailing trend lines and dynamics will result in one of these futures (or an extrapolation thereof) for the Navy, almost by default. Indeed, the momentum pointing toward a most likely alternative future is powerful, and without dramatic changes, one of the five already looks to be the Navy we will have in 2025 and beyond—but only if the resources for it are forthcoming.

Hope is Not a Strategy

A global Navy is a key component of U.S. national—kinetic and, increasingly, non-kinetic—power.² This begs the question: 15 and more years from now, what should (or will) the Navy look like? We know today’s Fleet and can readily project, assuming straight-line trends during the next several years (a questionable assumption at best), what tomorrow’s Fleet is likely to comprise. After all, most of the ships expected to be in the water in 2025 are already in the active force or under construction in 2010. The sharper focus should be on the strategic construct of the future Navy: what *should* the Fleet look like and why? As the late political scientist Samuel Huntington once explained, if a “military service does not possess such a [strategic] concept, it becomes purpose-less, it wallows about amid a variety of conflicting and confusing goals, and ultimately it suffers both physical and moral degeneration.”³

Navies in the 21st century have two fundamental roles.⁴ The first entails handling regional disorder

and “messiness.” And dealing with it is of paramount importance—from piracy off the Horn of Africa, to drug, arms, and human trafficking around the globe. This would show the clear implications of the “two-way linkages between good order at sea and good order on land and the simple fact that, without it, the human ability to fully exploit the potential value of the sea will be severely constrained.”⁵ The second focuses on more traditional maritime power projection.

Even as navies respond to or anticipate expanding maritime security and constabulary tasks, the requirements to project regionally concentrated combat-credible maritime power to (1) limit regional conflict with deployed, decisive maritime power; (2) deter major-power war; and (3) win our nation’s wars also continue to increase.⁶ Every once in a while, in addition to humanitarian assistance and disaster response, the Navy will be directed to kill people and destroy things. The cost to accommodate both of these trends comes at a time when the Navy and the nation are cash-strapped, with skyrocketing deficits and defense budgets driving political and economic pressures to contain and cut spending.⁷ The irony is palpable: as the importance of the Navy (and Marine Corps and Coast Guard) continues to rise, the capability *and* capacity for it to continue to be everything to everyone, everywhere, are being called into question.⁸

AirSea Battle Concept

The Navy (and the other four armed services, as well) confronts two stark realities: a gradually devolving geo-strategic landscape coupled with a rapidly weakening budgetary position. Through one geostrategic lens, we see the defense environment’s future characterized by the AirSea Battle Concept (ASBC), which has been gaining traction over the past several months. The 2010 *Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)* directed the development of the ASBC to defeat “adversaries across the range of military operations, including adversaries equipped with sophisticated anti-access and area-denial capabilities. The concept will address how air and naval forces will integrate capabilities across all operational domains—air, sea, land, space, and cyberspace—to counter growing challenges to U.S. freedom of action.”⁹

The ASBC concludes that with “the spread of advanced military technologies and their exploitation by other militaries, especially China’s People’s Liberation Army and to a far lesser extent Iran’s military and Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, the U.S. military’s ability to preserve military access to two key areas of vital interest, the Western Pacific and the Persian Gulf, is being increasingly challenged.”¹⁰

From a budgetary perspective, the analysis by now-Under Secretary of the Navy Robert Work while he was at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) in 2009 provides an excellent discussion on the “demand signal” that the Fleet, or in his phraseology the Total Battle Force Network (TFBN), will need to meet.¹¹

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In a landmark article in the May 1954 *Proceedings*, political scientist Samuel Huntington warned against wallowing without a strategy. According to a study by the Center for Naval Analyses, today’s Navy has some hard choices to make soon to ensure that it remains “globally influential.” The status quo, it seems, is not a viable option.

The TFBN refers to the Navy's transition from a loosely connected Fleet of individual ships to a "system of collaborative battle networks that would share data from across the force to form common operational pictures and use internet protocol-based systems to enable interactive combat planning, targeting, and execution," (i.e., "FORCEnet").

This means that the Navy is defined less by the gross numbers of ships and more by the combined capabilities found in its TFBN, which itself is part of a larger "National Fleet." Work delineated the demands that the Cold War Navy needed to meet and how decisions made some 30 years ago echo still today. However, in answering the question—"What Must The Future TFBN Be Able To Do?"—it is clear that he expects the Fleet must maintain combat-credible forces in multiple world regions and contribute to favorable regional-security conditions, as well as fulfilling the broader goals of deterring and winning wars. No longer at CSBA, he is in a much better position to put his phraseology into operation.

With the demand signal clearly high, Ronald O'Rourke's regular reporting to Congress on Navy force structure issues helps inform the corresponding supply/resourcing part of the discussion. In an April 2010 report, he notes that in past years various independent estimates of "the cost of implementing the 30-year shipbuilding plan has been higher than the Navy's estimates, reinforcing concerns among some observers about the prospective affordability of the plan."¹²

Likewise, Eric Labs of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) concludes that the Navy routinely underestimates the cost of its 30-year shipbuilding plan.¹³ In May 2010, Labs reported, "Costs for new-ship construction alone would average \$19.0 billion per year, 20 percent greater than the Navy's figure of \$15.9 billion." Likewise, total shipbuilding would run at \$21 billion per year. In recent years, Navy shipbuilding and conversion averaged only about \$13 billion annually.

Moreover, these are not minor differences, but several billion dollars annually—and are not a small issue



According to the AirSea Battle Concept, the mid-century Navy will likely face two formidable challenges to military access to the western Pacific Ocean and the Persian Gulf: China and its People's Liberation Army (above)—here, in a 31 August training session in Beijing—and Iran, with its elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (below), pictured during a 2007 military parade in Tehran.



given the kind of budget pressures on which Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has been focusing.¹⁴ Indeed, the CBO projects that defense spending would decline to its lowest levels, as a percentage of gross domestic product, since prior to World War II.¹⁵ And without major structural changes in the budget, spending on interest would crowd out defense spending by 2018, according to the CSBA, resulting in large defense cuts within three years.¹⁶

In essence, then, the service kicks the can down the road, hoping that, as CNA put it in the "Tipping Point," the myths of "reducing the demand signal and 'getting well' in future budgets" will come to pass.¹⁷ This is not likely to be the case, with both geostrategic and budget trends pushing the Navy into difficult choices.

Five Alternative Navies

In cooperation with the CNO's Naval Warfare Integration Group (N00X), the Center for Naval Analyses addressed the hard question—"At what point might the U.S. Navy cease to be globally influential?"—and examined the dynamics that would shape five possible futures for the U.S. Navy:

- *Status Quo Navy* that lets the bets ride
- *2-Hub Navy* maintaining combat-credible hubs built around carrier strike groups (CSGs) in the Central Command (CENTCOM) and Pacific Command (PACOM) areas of responsibility (AORs)
- *1+Hub Navy* built around a CSG in PACOM or CENTCOM, but not both
- *Shaping Navy* focused on peacetime engagement activities and crisis response, and
- *Surge Navy* with most naval forces brought home.

CNA concluded that even with scarce resources, there are a range of "potential avenues for maintaining forward combat-credible presence and exerting influence on a global scale," but they involve "difficult trade-offs from long-held Navy positions."¹⁸ At the heart of it, when the Navy cannot afford to do all six core capabilities called for in *A Cooperative Strategy "24/7"* worldwide, it will be forced into choosing between (1) meeting the demands of maritime security operations, engagement, and deterrence operations; and (2) unbalancing the Fleet to meet potential adversaries with combat-credible forces for "tailored deterrence."¹⁹ (Six core capabilities for the Navy are called out: Forward Presence, Deterrence, Sea Control, Power Projection, Maritime Security, and Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Response.) The decision will have an impact on all investment decisions Navy leadership will need to make in the coming years.

That said, in the *Status Quo* scenario no hard decisions are made, and the Navy muddles through, trying to answer all bells from increasingly wide-ranging and demanding missions, but without the requisite resourcing. The Navy attempts to maintain a combat-credible set of two hubs simultaneously, while at the same time continues to perform peacetime engagement missions as well as growing its ballistic-missile-defense forces. In essence, the Navy tries to do everything but manages to do none of it well—what CNA calls "salami slicing" the Fleet, leading to a breaking point. Huntington would characterize it as "wallowing" amid conflicting and confusing goals, ultimately suffering physical and moral degeneration.

In the *2-Hub* scenario, the Navy would be centered on forces forward-based and deployed in the Western Pacific and the Persian Gulf. The emphasis would be placed on combat-credible forces designed to meet peer and near-peer competitors (e.g., the Peoples' Republic of China [PRC] or Iran), principally comprising CSGs and related strike/projection assets such as guided-missile surface combatants, attack and guided-missile submarines, and logistics vessels. This concentration at the high end would be accomplished "by reducing the emphasis and force structure for amphibious forces and low-end, tailored mission presence ships, such as the [Littoral Combat Ship]"

This construct seeks to preserve naval dominance in areas where threats to U.S. interests as well as regional/global stability are judged most likely to exist in the future. It would provide tangible reassurance to allies and partners in the most-challenged regions, but presence and engagement outside of the hubs would be substantially decreased. By choosing to focus on the high end and on two distinct regions, this Navy would be less capable of supporting today's low-end operations and have less surge capacity for unanticipated/emergent domestic and global tasks.

The *1+ Hub* alternative focuses on "combat-credible visible forward presence" in the Western Pacific, explicitly as a hedge against the PRC, but also as a counter to North Korea. The forces are centered on CSGs and strike assets, providing deterrence, sea denial, and assurance to allies and partners in the region such as South Korea, Japan, and Australia, among others. The *1+ Hub Navy* would remain engaged in the CENTCOM AOR, but in a more limited capacity, supporting counterinsurgency and counterterrorism/piracy. Reduced surge capacity as well as increased demands by CENTCOM (without the requisite ships to meet it) are the principal risks for this Navy, and with the unbalanced nature of the Fleet there would also be less flexibility for forces moving between regions.

In stark contrast, the *Shaping Navy* maintains a strong amphibious force, deploying "them as afloat staging bases for a range of operations ashore and as large assets to carry personnel, bringing training and expertise to many parts of the world." This Navy focuses on engagement and interoperability with partners—a goal well-suited to an uncertain world and one that is consistent with much of the 2007 maritime strategy. Harkening to Soviet dictator Josef Stalin's dictum, "quantity has a quality all of its own," it opts to preserve Fleet numbers by sacrificing high-end combat capability.

Finally, rather than focusing on particular regions or choosing to be engaged in shaping activities worldwide, the *Surge Navy* is instead based on a powerful but smaller home Fleet comprising high-end platforms in CSGs capable of defeating any adversary. Low-end forces available for engagement and security operations would be marginalized, with resources instead devoted to training with joint and allied forces. It would seek to maintain global influence through "virtual presence"—the knowledge among allies and adversaries that the Navy can deploy a combat-credible force worldwide on relatively short notice. This isolationist *Surge Navy* assumes that U.S. foreign policy shifts toward a less activist "off-shore balancer" role, relying on deterrence rather than engagement.

A Default Option

Each of these alternatives seeks to maintain global influence while allocating risk to different areas based on the overarching goals of the distinct Fleet constructs. However, geostrategic realities may well force the Navy to the *2-Hub Fleet*, particularly as the *AirSea Battle* construct gains traction.²⁰ Moreover, events have moved beyond think-tank discussions, with both China and Iran becoming more assertive in their spheres of influence, setting

the stage for a Navy needing to have the capability and capacity to engage in two demanding regions.

The high-profile language in the *QDR* regarding the Air-Sea Battle Concept seems to set the Navy on a course to counterbalance China at the high end. Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in August 2010 admitted that he has “moved from being curious” about what China is doing “to being concerned about what they’re doing.”²¹ Specifically, his concerns include China’s continued territorial claims throughout the South China Sea, illegal seizure of Vietnamese and Philippine islands, and skirmishes with fishing boats off the coasts of Indonesia and Vietnam.²²

There are troubling area-denial concerns, too. In March 2010 testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Admiral Robert Willard, Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, stated unequivocally that China is “developing and testing a conventional antiship ballistic missile [ASBM] based on the DF-21/CSS-5 MRBM designed specifically to target aircraft carriers.”²³ Introspection by a group of Chinese scholars in a series of articles published in state newspapers suggested that China’s confidence in its economic development was turning into “national arrogance.”²⁴

Andrew Erickson, at the Naval War College, points to growing Chinese hubris in describing “an unexplained cartoon animation at the end of a lengthy 29 November 2009 program on ASBMs broadcast on China Central Television Channel 7 [China’s official military channel], a [U.S.] sailor falsely assumes that his carrier’s Aegis defense systems can destroy an incoming ASBM as effectively as a cruise missile, with disastrous results.”²⁵

Looking to the potential *causis belli* meriting the need of a second hub, Iran continues to be a source of instability throughout the CENTCOM AOR. Even with national and international sanctions in place, the rhetoric from the regime has not abated. More troubling, Iran’s nuclear program continues to vex regional and international powers, with no resolution in sight. CSBA’s Andrew Krepinevich characterizes the Iranian threat mainly in terms of its development of anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities.²⁶

These include mobile anti-ship cruise missiles, submarines, small high-speed coastal vessels, and sea mines. He notes that “while the situation may be manageable for U.S. mari-

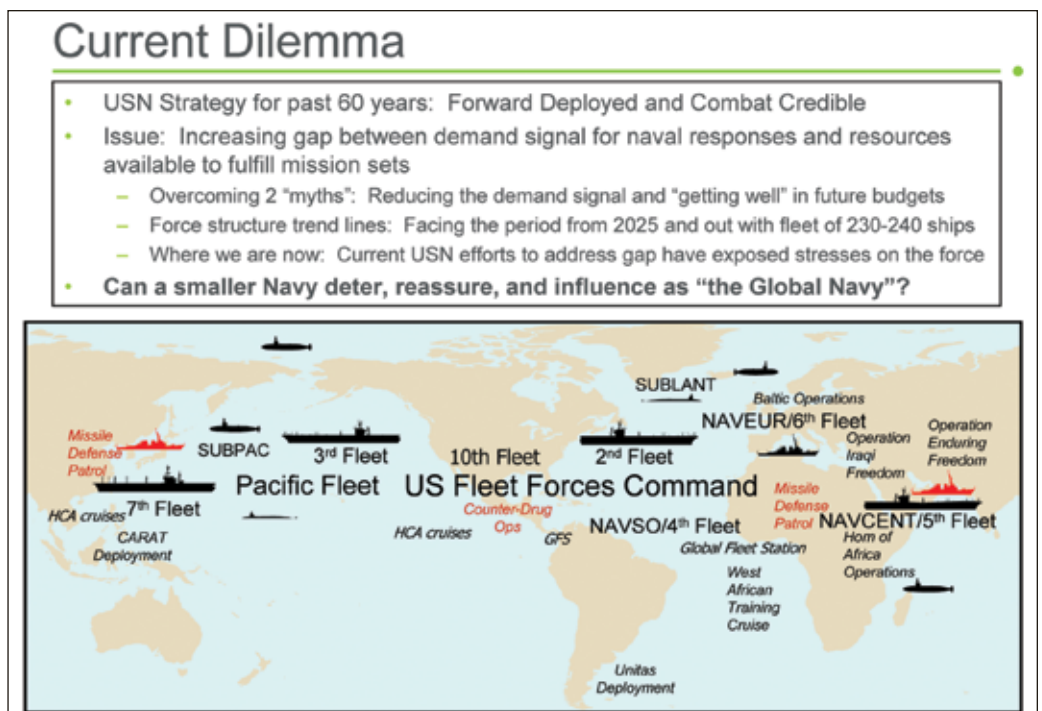
time forces over the near term, Iran seems determined to continue developing more formidable A2/AD capabilities” that could impact commercial shipping and energy production throughout the region. In this regard, an unpleasant reality for today’s and tomorrow’s Fleet is that, since the end of World War II, mines have seriously damaged or sunk four times as many U.S. Navy ships than all other means of attack.²⁷ That lesson cannot be lost on the Iranians, or the Chinese for that matter.

Through a Glass Darkly

Given today’s geostrategic realities, of the five “Tipping Point” alternatives, it seems that the Navy is well on the way to either choosing, or being forced to choose, or accepting by default the 2-Hub Fleet construct. However, with top-level guidance focused on today’s wars, it is of little surprise that the congressionally mandated independent review of the 2010 *QDR* challenges DOD’s current path. For one, Senator Carl Levin (D-MI) noted the review’s “most significant recommendation would increase the size of the Navy to 346 ships to promote and protect our strategic interests in the Pacific.”²⁸

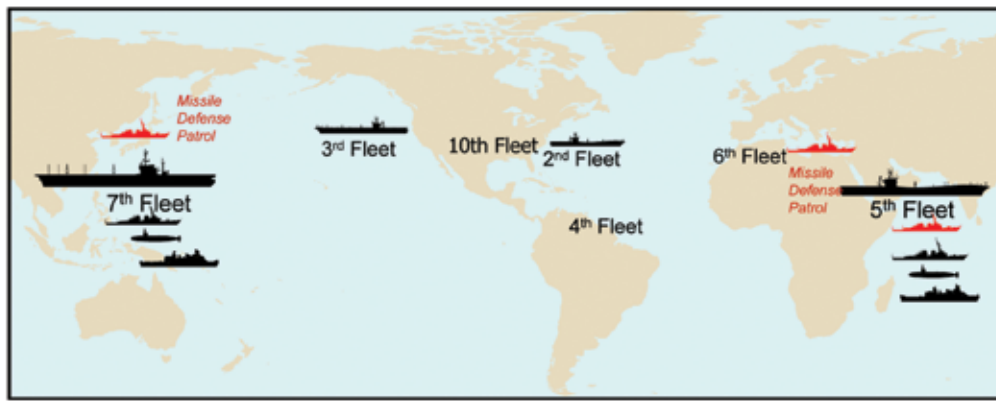
The report concludes that the issues of force structure, in particular for the Navy, are sufficiently serious that an explicit warning is appropriate.²⁹ To safeguard U.S. interests, the Navy “will need to retain the ability to transit freely the areas of the Western Pacific for security and economic reasons.”³⁰

Ideally, a well-formed strategy informs investment decisions, and the Maritime Strategy clearly answers the first part. However, insofar as *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* does provide strategic guidance, the clear disconnect between resourcing and investment decisions is disconcerting. As Admiral Roughead told Congress in May 2009, “we are stretched in our ability to . . . modernize and



2-Hub Navy: Detering Regional Challenges

- Robust forces forward based and deployed in WESTPAC and Arabian Gulf
 - Dominant naval forces in 2 hubs - threats likely to exist for foreseeable future
 - Meet demand for combat-credible forward forces for contingencies and OPLANs
- Visible deterrence and reassurance, escalation dominance, mobility/flexibility
 - Loss of USN relevance to "low-end fight," HA/DR, engagement, shaping
- Reduced number of ships used for engagement, maritime policing



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procure the Navy for tomorrow," yet the Navy's posture statement and strategy still call for a naval force that can be everything to everyone and second to none.³¹

The status quo (or "muddling-through") scenario should not be an option on the table; the numbers simply do not allow it. And with the disconnect between what the Navy says its 30-year shipbuilding plan will cost and what independent analysts say is reality, the Navy will be forced into making difficult choices. Internal and external circumstances have a way of forcing a particular decision on leadership, even when it is not the preferred solution. In late 2010, it appears that challenges in the Western Pacific and Middle East will drive tomorrow's Fleet to a 2-Hub Navy.

The critical question, then, is where in the world will the resources be found to pay for it? ❄

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