

Forward Presence in the Modern Navy: From the Cold War to a Future Tailored Force

Forward presence is a central element of U.S. naval strategy. Since the earliest days of the republic, American forces have operated forward in peacetime and wartime. Forward operating naval forces have not, however, always been combat credible.

Before World War II, the U.S. approach to forward presence fluctuated and largely involved small detachments, which were supported periodically in peacetime or reinforced in time of war by major fleet units. Since World War II, for political, geographic, and technological reasons, the United States has maintained major fleet elements forward. Over time these forces were increasingly forward-based, usually in the territory of newly developed allies and partners, as well as forward-deployed, to allow the United States to maintain both permanent and intermittent presence in different areas of operation, or “hubs.”

Today, combat-credible naval forward presence is largely recognized as a key national advantage that helps defend American lives and property, protect allies, ensure the free flow of commerce, prevent the rise of a hegemon on the Eurasian continent, and help provide for the common good (to include not only humanitarian missions, but also the post–World War II global order of open trade, collective security, and adherence to international norms).

However, a range of domestic and international challenges has increasingly called into question the viability of this approach. In essence, it is difficult for a shrinking fleet to maintain combat-credible numbers and combinations of capable assets, and the growing scale and sophistication of counter-naval capabilities posed by China, Russia, and Iran threaten to hold forward-operating forces at risk, thus undermining their combat credibility and ability to carry out missions of presence, deterrence, reassurance, and warfighting.

This essay examines the historical evolution of U.S. naval forward presence, with a focus on the post–World War II era; describes the current state of forward presence; and identifies alternatives that can inform Navy force structure and posture decisions.

Scholars and practitioners have examined U.S. naval forward presence. Their works can largely be divided into those that explore historical elements of forward presence and deployment strategy and those that evaluate options relevant to forward presence in light of resources, challenges, threats, and opportunities.

In the former category, Samuel Huntington’s “National Policy and the Transoceanic Navy,” published in 1954, divided the history of U.S. naval policy into a “Continental Phase,” an “Oceanic Phase,” and a “Transoceanic Phase.”¹ The seminal article summarized trends in U.S. naval history, articulated the need for service strategic concepts, and argued the Navy was effectively suited to counter threats in Eurasia.²

More recently, Peter Swartz’s 2002 Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) report, *Sea Changes: Transforming U.S. Navy Deployment Strategy, 1775–2002*, is the most elegant

¹ Samuel Huntington, “National Policy and the Transoceanic Navy,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 80, no. 5 (May 1954), 483.

² Of note, Huntington’s work was particularly timely as it advanced a service strategic concept that addressed counter-arguments (especially by some early nuclear theorists and the U.S. Air Force) that the Navy and Army were largely irrelevant to future warfare.

and comprehensive work on Navy deployment strategy.³ The report describes 25 distinct eras in Navy deployment strategy since 1775, including eight in the post–World War II era. It also identifies future deployment strategy options. Adam Siegel’s CNA report *The Use of Naval Forces in the Post-War Era: U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps Crisis Response Activity, 1946–1990* serves as a detailed review of incidents in which naval forces were employed during the Cold War.⁴

In the early 1990s, the Navy argued that its peacetime combat-credible forward deployment strategy should be its principal force-sizing criterion, building on earlier arguments made throughout the Cold War and especially in the 1980s. The 1994 Navy Service Concept *Forward . . . From the Sea*, signed by Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jay Johnson, codified that the “primary purpose of forward-deployed naval forces is to project American power from the sea to influence events ashore in the littoral regions of the world across the operational spectrum of peace, crisis and war.”⁵ Subsequent naval service concepts have reaffirmed this stance.

In terms of options for forward presence, Dov Zakheim and Andrew Hamilton’s 1978 Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report on the *Peacetime Presence Mission* illuminated the force structure and budgetary impact of peacetime missions on the Department of the Navy.⁶ Many of the options presented in this work still serve as the basis for options under contemporary consideration. In 2010 Daniel Whiteneck, Michael Price, Neil Jenkins, and Peter Swartz wrote a CNA report, *The Navy at a Tipping Point*, that sounded the alarm on the unsustainable strain of existing models for combat-credible forward presence amid the shrinking fleet.⁷ In 2015, Eric Labs of CBO wrote a report identifying options for *Preserving the Navy’s Forward Presence with a Smaller Fleet*.⁸ Later that year, Bryan Clark and Jesse Sloman of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) wrote a report also contending that the Navy and Marine Corps were *Deploying Beyond Their Means* and offering specific alternatives to maximize combat-credible forward presence.⁹

The aforementioned eight works are arguably the most important in terms of examining the broad discourse on American naval forward presence history and strategies available to the nation. Other works examined for this essay play an important role in complementing the key works by providing additional detail on specific historical periods or strategies, describing factors that informed the adoption of employment or

³ Peter M. Swartz, *Sea Changes: Transforming US Navy Deployment Strategy, 1775–2002* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 31 July 2002).

⁴ Adam B. Siegel, *The Use of Naval Forces in the Post-War Era: U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps Crisis Response Activity, 1946–1990*, CRM 90-246 (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, February 1991).

⁵ Jay L. Johnson, *Forward . . . From the Sea* (Washington, DC: U.S. Navy, March 1997), <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/policy/fromsea/ffseanoc.html>.

⁶ Dov S. Zakheim and Andrew Hamilton, *U.S. Naval Forces: The Peacetime Presence Mission* (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office, December 1978), <https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/95th-congress-1977-1978/reports/78-cbo-044.pdf>.

⁷ Daniel Whiteneck, Michael Price, Neil Jenkins, and Peter Swartz, *The Navy at a Tipping Point: Maritime Dominance at Stake?* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 2010), 3.

⁸ Eric Labs, *Preserving the Navy’s Forward Presence with a Smaller Fleet* (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office, March 2015).

⁹ Bryan Clark and Jesse Sloman, *Deploying Beyond Their Means: America’s Navy and Marine Corps at a Tipping Point* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 18 November 2015). Of note, Thomas Mahnken serves as President and Chief Executive Officer of CSBA.

deployment strategies, examining dynamics that challenge current deployment strategies, and advancing models and capabilities to address existing and projected gaps.

However, none of the works comprehensively reviews both the history of forward presence in the modern Navy and examines the range of alternatives available today. This essay seeks to contribute to the rich literature on the subject by examining previous secondary and published primary sources on the subject and offering options for national, Department of Defense, and Department of the Navy policymakers.

I. History of Forward Naval Presence

U.S. forward naval presence has deep roots in the nation's history. This essay focuses on the history of U.S. forward presence in four phases: from the Spanish-American War to World War II, from World War II through Occupation, the Cold War, and from the 1990s to the early 2000s. Nonetheless, the history of U.S. naval forward presence in the 18th and 19th century (largely what Huntington termed the Continental Phase) left an indelible mark on Navy culture and strategies that significantly informed the choices taken in the 20th century.

During the War of Independence, although most Navy ships and privateers operated in the western Atlantic and Lake Champlain, a number conducted commerce raiding—and even amphibious raids—off British territory in the Caribbean and British Isles. After the war, the nation sold off its fleet given its high maintenance costs, and lacked a Navy until 1798 (although it started construction of six frigates in 1794).¹⁰

During the Quasi-War with France from 1798–1800, the nation's naval forces focused on protecting American merchant vessels in the Atlantic and Caribbean; however, some ships deployed to the East Indies to escort American merchantmen.¹¹ From 1801 to 1805, President Thomas Jefferson deployed a squadron of Navy ships to blockade, bombard, and assault the Barbary states.¹² During the War of 1812, in addition to engagements on the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain, the Atlantic, and Caribbean, frigates and sloops deployed into the Pacific to attack British ships.¹³

After the war of 1812, the Navy transformed itself into a “globally-dispersed set of forward-stationed squadrons” directed to conduct commerce and whaling protection, primarily against pirates.¹⁴ The Navy established dedicated stations of varying duration across the world: the Mediterranean Station, the West India Station, the Africa Station, the Brazil Station, the Pacific Station, and the East India Station. Navy ships generally operated independently and seldom exercised with other ships.¹⁵ These forces also carried out diplomatic, scientific, and humanitarian missions.

¹⁰ Ian Toll, *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the US Navy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).

¹¹ Michael A. Palmer, *Stoddert's War: Naval Operations During the Quasi-War with France, 1798–1801* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1987).

¹² William S. Dudley, “The Origins of the U.S. Navy's Mediterranean Squadron, 1783–1816,” *International Journal of Naval History*, 1 (April 2002).

¹³ Gordon K. Harrington, “The American Challenge to the English East India Company During the War of 1812,” in *New Interpretations in Naval History: Selected Papers from the Tenth Naval History Symposium*, eds. Jack Sweetman et al. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1993).

¹⁴ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

Of consequence for U.S. naval posture, the 1817 Rush-Bagot Agreement between the United States and Great Britain dramatically limited naval forces on the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain to four small vessels for each party. This arms limitation agreement allowed the United States to increase its proportion of naval resources dedicated to other areas.¹⁶

From 1841 until nearly the end of the century, with the exception of the Civil War, the Navy adopted a deployment strategy that combined a home surge force for defense of the homeland from potential threats, principally Great Britain, with continued presence in forward stations and diplomatic and scientific expeditions. The most acclaimed of these expeditions was Commodore Matthew Perry's opening of Japan with ships of the East India Squadron in 1853. The following year, the East India Squadron deployed its first warship up the Yangtze River.¹⁷

After the Civil War, Navy deployment strategy largely continued as before. However, the Civil War saw a dramatic reduction in the size of the U.S. merchant marine, primarily due to the result of ship owners transferring their flags for security and competitive reasons to Great Britain; consequently, the post-bellum forward presence force had significantly less U.S.-flagged commerce to protect.¹⁸ Nonetheless, it continued to conduct a range of commerce protection, diplomatic, and humanitarian missions. This period exhibited dozens of missions in which U.S. naval forces conducted highly assertive uses or threats to use force in resolving disputes.

A. Phase I: Spanish-American War to World War II

Toward the end of the 19th century, the Navy gradually entered into Huntington's "Oceanic Era," a period in which the nation shifted its sights from homeland territorial defense to defense of its interests at sea and its overseas territories. During the Spanish-American War of 1898, the North Atlantic and Asiatic Squadrons conducted sea control operations in the Caribbean and the Philippines, respectively. Resounding victory in the war directly resulted in the U.S. acquisition of the Philippines, Guam, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, and the subsequent annexation of the Republic of Hawaii through the Newlands Resolution. These new territories increased the defense responsibilities of the Navy and Army and contributed to an increase in peacetime-tailored forward presence forces in the Western Pacific and Caribbean.

The period's most influential navalist, Alfred Thayer Mahan, contended that apart from requisite forces for coaling stations, the Navy should consolidate its ships in a home battle fleet, rather than forward squadrons that could be destroyed in detail.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the Navy continued to maintain the North Atlantic Squadron, the European Squadron, the South Atlantic Squadron, the Pacific Squadron, and the Asiatic Squadron, with the preponderance of heavy naval forces in the North Atlantic Squadron. Forward

¹⁶ Stanley L. Falk, "Disarmament on the Great Lakes: Myth or Reality?," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 87 (December 1961), 69–73.

¹⁷ Kemp Tolley, *Yangtze Patrol: The U.S. Navy in China* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1971).

¹⁸ K. Jack Bauer, *A Maritime History of the United States: The Role of America's Seas and Waterways* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 241–96.

¹⁹ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660–1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1890).

squadrons continued their assertive practices, regularly using force or the threat of force throughout Central and South America, Lebanon, Turkey, Korea, and China.²⁰

During his first term in office, President Theodore Roosevelt diverted from regular peacetime naval posture by employing the global fleet to deter foreign intervention and signal support. Most notably, in 1903 he repositioned all Atlantic forces to the Caribbean and the Pacific Squadron (and a significant portion of the Asiatic Squadron) to near the Pacific coast of Panama in order to solidify U.S. support for an independent Panama and deter potential European intervention.²¹ The same year Roosevelt deployed the North Atlantic Squadron for a major diplomatic mission to France and Germany, thus forward-deploying the Navy's combat-credible force.²²

In 1905, Roosevelt eliminated the Mediterranean and South Atlantic Squadrons and over time reorganized the Navy into an Atlantic Fleet, a Pacific Fleet, and an Asiatic Fleet, with the majority of heavy battleships allocated to the Atlantic Fleet in support of War Plan Black to counter potential German naval forces that might seek to establish an advanced base in the Caribbean.²³ Although the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets focused on sophisticated fleet exercises near the United States, they were occasionally surged for short deployments from 1905 to 1914 to signal diplomatic support to various states and demonstrate U.S. power.²⁴ These were frequently opposed by naval officers, who protested these distractions from fleet exercises in support of war plans. The most famous cruise for diplomatic purposes of this period was that of the Great White Fleet of 1907–1909, which highlighted the importance of refueling stations and the relative utility of oil over coal to power naval ships.²⁵

With the outbreak of World War I, the nation ceased deploying the Navy on forward surges, leaving it to concentrate on exercises in its Atlantic and Pacific Fleets in preparation for its potential involvement in the war. Small groups of forward naval forces in the Caribbean and China did conduct minor diplomatic and peacekeeping operations. Additionally, the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 increased the ability of the fleet to consolidate.

During World War I, instead of the planned surface engagement with the German Navy, the Navy focused on sealift and escort across the Atlantic. While the majority of the fleet aggregated in the Atlantic to execute these missions, the Navy continued to maintain the Asiatic Fleet on station throughout the conflict. The size of the Navy increased from 224 ships in 1914 to 324 in 1917 to 774 by the end of World War I.²⁶

During the Inter-War Period, the large fleet consolidated first in 1919 into two equally-sized Atlantic and Pacific Fleets to prepare to counter either Great Britain or Japan and then in 1922 into a single United States Fleet largely based on the West Coast

²⁰ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 29.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Holger H. Herwig, *Politics of Frustration: The United States in German Naval Planning, 1889–1941* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1976), 42–91.

²⁴ Seward W. Livermore, "The American Navy as a Factor in World Politics, 1903–1913," *American Historical Review* 63: 4 (July 1958): 879.

²⁵ James R. Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1988).

²⁶ U.S. Navy Active Ship Force Levels, U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html>.

to counter Japan.²⁷ Avoiding forward deployments that were perceived as provocative, the U.S. Fleet focused on annual fleet exercises and experiments near the United States. The fleet was only deployed forward once this period, to Australia and the southwest Pacific in 1925, which elicited significant criticism from Japan.²⁸

During this period, the Special Service Squadron in the Caribbean and the Asiatic Fleet, with its subordinate Yangtze Patrol, conducted various diplomatic and peacekeeping missions. In 1937, during the course of the Sino-Japanese War, Japan sank the Yangtze Patrol gunboat *Panay* (PR-5) and attacked three Standard Oil tankers, which led to a reduction in Asiatic Fleet efforts to protect U.S. interests in China.²⁹

In May of 1940, after its annual Fleet Problem, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the U.S. Fleet to remain in Hawaii indefinitely as a deterrent to Japan. Fleet Problem XXII, scheduled for January 1941 in the Central or North Pacific, was subsequently cancelled in order to not provoke Japan.³⁰ In 1941 the U.S. Fleet was re-divided into an Atlantic Fleet (formerly the Atlantic Patrol Force), a Pacific Fleet, and a small Asiatic Fleet.³¹ This action further consolidated the force and placed the majority of modern ships in the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets.

In contrast to the modern Pacific Fleet, on 7 December 1941, the Asiatic Fleet consisted of one relatively modern heavy cruiser, *Houston* (CA-30), one old light cruiser, *Marblehead* (CL-12), 13 World War I-era *Clemson*-class destroyers, 29 submarines (a mix of older *Porpoise*-class and new *Salmon* and *Sargo*-class boats), one pre-World War I destroyer tender, and a variety of older gunboats, minesweepers, and auxiliary support ships, old coastal Yangtze River Patrol vessels, the 4th Marine Regiment, and amphibian patrol aircraft.³² Overall, the Asiatic Fleet lacked the ability to deter credibly. Instead, at best it constituted a delaying force and at worse a tripwire, while the Pacific Fleet (and reinforcing Atlantic Fleet) represented the nation's deterrent force.

B. Phase II: World War II through Occupation

During World War II, the Navy was used to protect territory, defend allies, protect commerce, conduct sea denial, and project power. Initial Japanese attacks decimated the Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor and a series of battles in early 1942 near the Dutch East Indies sunk most of the Asiatic Fleet. The remnants of the attrited Asiatic Fleet were incorporated into the South West Pacific Area Command in February 1942.³³

The Pacific Fleet initially focused on raiding Japanese islands and countering the Japanese fleet, while Submarine Force Pacific conducted forward antiship patrols. By 1943, following a series of victories, the Navy reorganized its Pacific Fleet into a

²⁷ William Braisted, "On the American Red and Red-Orange Plans, 1919-1939" in *Naval Warfare in the Twentieth Century, 1900-1945*, ed. Gerald Jordan (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 167-85; Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1991).

²⁸ Peter M. Sales, "Going Down Under in 1925," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (1985), 45-53.

²⁹ Harland J. Swanson, "The *Panay* Incident: Prelude to Pearl Harbor," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, (December 1967).

³⁰ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 172.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

³² David DuBois, "Admiral Thomas C. Hart And The Demise Of The Asiatic Fleet 1941-1942" (2014). Electronic Theses and Dissertations, East Tennessee State University. Paper 2331. <http://dc.etsu.edu/etd/2331>.

³³ *Ibid.*, 58.

Third/Fifth Fleet, the Seventh Fleet (under the South West Pacific Area Command), a continued Submarine Force Pacific, and Twelfth, Eighth, and Fourth Fleets in the Atlantic. As the ability of the fleets to exert sea control increased, major U.S. naval forces focused on transoceanic power projection for strikes and amphibious assaults.

These forces were supported not only by a burgeoning network of advanced bases and afloat logistics forces that included sophisticated forward maintenance, battle damage repair with floating drydocks and other assets, and medical facilities, but also an underway replenishment capability that reached its apotheosis with the introduction of underway munitions transfer capability for aircraft carriers during the Iwo Jima campaign in 1945.³⁴

After World War II, the Navy continued to operate from a significant number of bases in both theaters that had supported the conduct of the war. Additionally, the Navy established bases in occupied portions of the former Nazi and Japanese empires. Forces operating forward supported occupation and relief efforts and were envisioned as a temporary global overseas presence.

C. Phase III: Cold War 1946–1947

In the first couple of years following World War II, the nation reinstated a deployment strategy in which equally powerful combat-credible surge battle fleets were stationed on both coasts of the United States, and smaller presence forces were deployed forward in the Pacific and Europe. The Seventh Fleet, based in the Marianas, supported the occupations of Japan, Korea, and western Pacific islands, and also supported Marines in China. A small Naval Forces Mediterranean/Northern European Force maintained a presence in European waters.

This new deployment strategy reflected not only change in the geopolitical landscape, but also in the size of the Navy, given the lack of an identified maritime threat. By 1947 the Navy had been pared down from a 6,800-ship leviathan in 1945 to a still-imposing 842 ships, which included 14 fleet carriers and four battleships.³⁵

³⁴ Of note the Navy experimented conducting underway coal refueling shortly after the Spanish-American War, and during World War I the Navy developed the ability to refuel destroyers conducting transatlantic convoy escort from tankers. After the Washington Treaties of 1922 prohibited fortification of fixed forward bases in the Pacific, afloat forward logistics support was identified as a critical enabling capability. However, the dedication of few funds to military logistics assets and the small size of the U.S. merchant marine inhibited the nation's logistics potential to support the fleet in war. By World War II the Navy had developed dedicated underway refueling procedures and assets (oilers) that increased in number and sophistication as the war progressed, and the size of the U.S. merchant marine dramatically increased. The subsequent Korean War led to the introduction of further improved, all-weather underway replenishment systems. For more information see: Worrall Carter, *Beans, Bullets, and Black Oil: The Story of Fleet Logistics Afloat in the Pacific During World War II* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953); Duncan S. Ballentine, *U.S. Naval Logistics in the Second World War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949); Thomas Wildenberg, *Gray Steel and Black Oil: Fast Tankers and Replenishment at Sea in the U.S. Navy, 1912–1995* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 2–7; Marvin O. Miller, John W. Hammett, and Terence P. Murphy, "The Development of the U.S. Navy Underway Replenishment Fleet," *Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers Transactions* Vol. 95 (1987), 123–58.

³⁵ U.S. Navy Active Ship Force Levels, U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html>.

Furthermore, to some strategists the tremendous power of nuclear weapons seemed to obviate the need for large naval forces. As Bernard Brodie wrote in 1946,

The atomic bomb introduces the possibility that in another general war the utility of navies will be decided ashore rather than at sea. A nation which has had its entire economy destroyed may be able to put a fleet to scant use The traditional concepts of military security which this country has developed over the past fifty years—in which the Navy was correctly avowed to be our ‘first line of defense’—must be reconsidered.³⁶

Two atomic tests at Bikini Atoll in the summer of 1946 (Operation Crossroads) assessed whether nuclear weapons could destroy an entire dispersed fleet. Although test observers concluded that “ships under way will rarely constitute suitable targets for atomic bomb attack” given the limited degree of damage to the ships targeted, the Navy’s strategic and operational utility was under assault.³⁷

Regardless, Navy forward deployments continued to play an important role in this period—even though the majority of naval forces was at home in the surge battle fleets. In 1946, amid Soviet pressure on Turkey and concern over Soviet presence in Iran, the battleship *Missouri* (BB-63) was employed to return the body of deceased Turkish ambassador to the United States to Istanbul, Turkey, as a sign of support for the Turkish government.³⁸ A subsequent port call in Piraeus, Greece similarly signaled support for the Greek government.³⁹ The following month, as the Communist insurgency in Greece grew, the aircraft carrier *Franklin D. Roosevelt* (CVB-42) and its escorts visited Piraeus to again underscore support for the Greek government, and the U.S. government announced a policy in which Navy units would be permanently stationed in the Mediterranean.⁴⁰ Similar visits were conducted by U.S. naval units throughout Europe in the subsequent years. Thus, even during a perceived period of post-war retrenchment, the Navy re-established permanent forward presence in the western Pacific and Mediterranean.

1948 Onward

In 1948, the Navy began deploying combat-credible forces forward in peacetime to counter mounting Soviet and broader Communist threats. Gradually, the Navy returned in force to where it had ended the previous war and stayed forward in force throughout the Cold War (and until today). World War II had revealed that American security depended on ensuring that no hegemon could dominate Eurasia and that, if conflict did occur, the ability to control sea lanes to surge ground and air forces forward was essential. This experience informed the maintenance of superior naval forces.

³⁶ Jakub J. Grygiel, “The Dilemmas of U.S. Maritime Supremacy in the Early Cold War,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28 (2): 187–216.

³⁷ Jonathan M. Weisgall, *Operation Crossroads: The Atomic Tests at Bikini Atoll* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994).

³⁸ Adam B. Siegel, *The Use of Naval Forces in the Post-War Era: U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps Crisis Response Activity, 1946–1990*, CRM 90-246 (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, February 1991).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

National leaders sought to use the Navy to protect U.S. territory, defend allies, protect commerce, prevent the rise of a hegemon, and act for the common good. As such, the Navy would serve as an instrument of presence, deterrence, reassurance, and warfighting—all aiming to shape Soviet behavior.

This shift toward a Navy deployment strategy that used combat-credible forward forces was driven by the geopolitics of the Cold War and the state of military technology. In terms of geopolitics, the United States had frontline allies on the European continent and just offshore who required protection from Soviet intimidation. The seemingly high probability of a war rapidly breaking out gave urgency to maintaining a swift, combat-credible response that would serve operational aims in time of war. The ability of Soviet forces to launch their own nuclear strikes from 1949 onward, quickly advance onto allied territory with ground forces, and disperse their naval forces (some of which eventually fielded nuclear weapons) placed a premium on eliminating Soviet forces early in a conflict. Lastly, by maintaining a forward force capable of achieving operational aims, the Navy aimed to reassure allies and deter Communist threats.

In terms of the state of military technology, naval forces—even carrier aircraft—initially exhibited relatively short strike ranges, which required naval forces to deploy far forward if they were to be ready for immediate employment in conflict. Furthermore, in order to translate U.S. maritime superiority into advantage against the Soviet continental power, the Navy would require new technological innovations that enabled strike from the sea, in addition to traditional sea control missions, especially securing Atlantic sea lines of communication.

In the 1948 Key West Agreement, the Navy obtained the right to control its own aviation assets and deploy nuclear weapons “in the carrying out of its function,” such as striking ports and inland airfields with aircraft that may sortie to attack the fleet.⁴¹ As a result, the Navy developed larger, angled-deck “supercarriers” that incorporated catapult assisted take-off but arrested recovery launch and recovery systems and strengthened flight decks capable of launching heavy, long-range jet aircraft. In addition, in the 1950s the Navy first developed carrier-launched nuclear bombers and then nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs). Initial *Polaris*-class submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) featured an approximately 2,500-nautical mile range, requiring the forward deployment of SSBNs in order to reach requisite inland targets. These SSBNs were supported by tenders forward-based in Scotland, Spain, and Guam.⁴²

During this Transoceanic Phase, the Navy employed self-sustaining combat-credible permanently forward-deployed numbered fleets that largely mirrored those forces that would have been used in time of war. Organized into European (initially mostly Mediterranean and then also eastern Atlantic), western Pacific, and later Arabian Sea/Persian Gulf hubs, these forces primarily consisted of carrier battle groups (CVBGs) and amphibious ready groups (ARGs).

These front-line capital ships and aircraft forward-deployed from the United States, and over time many were also forward-based. Throughout the Cold War, U.S. naval forces were eventually homeported in Japan, the Philippines, Bahrain, Spain, Greece, Italy, the United Kingdom, Iceland, and Norway, among other countries.⁴³ This

⁴¹ Grygiel.

⁴² Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 192.

⁴³ Clark and Sloman, *Deploying Beyond Their Means*.

approach of placing front-line capital ships forward marked a major break from earlier deployment strategies in which forward-homeporting was reserved for small groups of second-line ships.

Although this approach increased the potential risk faced by fleet units compared to homeporting in the United States, it had both strategic and operational advantages. “Strategically, basing warfighting forces forward reduced American response time, showing the Soviets that aggression may be promptly defeated or that punishment would be swift. Further, forward-based forces helped demonstrate American resolve to allies and partners concerned by the oceans separating them from the United States. Operationally, forward-based forces provide more forward presence, or enable the same presence to be maintained by a smaller overall fleet.”⁴⁴

As confrontation with the Soviet Union increased in the late 1940s, U.S. naval officers gradually shifted their preferred deployment strategy to one in which combat-credible forward presence forces permanently operated forward to deter Soviet aggression and shape the geopolitical environment. This posture first took hold in Europe as forces in the Mediterranean grew into the permanent presence of a CVBG, an amphibious task force, and supporting submarine and destroyer deployments. The force was renamed the Sixth Task Fleet in June 1948.⁴⁵ Later, a combat-credible forward presence posture was adopted in the western Pacific, with the deployment of a carrier task force to the western Pacific on a permanent basis in 1950.⁴⁶ Thus, the Navy adopted a two forward presence hub strategy in which at least two carrier task forces operated in each of the European and western Pacific hubs.

By the early 1950s, the “home fleets” (the First and Second, and after 1973 the Third in place of the First) conducted at-sea fleet exercise coordination for the Navy.⁴⁷ Of note, these exercises took place not only near the United States, but also far forward. Often the exercises aimed to “work up,” or prepare, naval forces for forward deployments, and these forces and already forward forces used exercises to demonstrate U.S. offensive capabilities and exercise freedom of navigation consistent with international law.

All the while, forward-operating forces continued to respond to a variety of crises. For example, following the withdrawal of Nationalist Forces from the Chinese mainland to Taiwan in 1949, Navy forces served to deter threatened Communist Chinese invasions of Taiwan and Nationalist invasions of Mainland China on various occasions, and in 1954 the Navy supported rescue efforts for a Cathay Pacific airliner that was shot down by People’s Republic of China aircraft (and during the course of operations downed three People’s Liberation Army aircraft that fired on U.S. aircraft).⁴⁸

Each of the forward fleets was considered capable of responding independently and supported by follow-on forces across the spectrum of operations. Although the Korean and Vietnam Wars did lead to the deployment of additional forces, and certain crises such as the 1956 Suez Crisis led to the surge deployment of additional forces, the Navy’s deployment strategy remained relatively constant.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁵ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 49.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁸ Siegel, *The Use of Naval Forces in the Post-War Era*.

The Navy's procurement strategy fluctuated significantly during this period. The post-World War II decline in the size of the fleet continued throughout the late 1940s, and in 1949 Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson cancelled the planned *United States* (CVA-58), the first of the so-called supercarriers, and would have established a Fiscal Year 1951 carrier force level requirement of four fleet aircraft carriers.⁴⁹ A series of Congressional hearings and combat experience in Korea demonstrated the utility of a larger fleet in general—and a larger carrier fleet in particular—and the new Secretary of Defense, George C. Marshall, approved construction of the first supercarrier, *Forrestal* (CVA-59).⁵⁰ The size of the carrier fleet grew from 11 in 1950 to 26 in 1962, before declining as older and less capable carriers were replaced by new construction.

During the early Cold War, the Navy deployed three classes of capabilities that greatly enhanced its combat credibility: the aforementioned nuclear forces, the Military Sea Transport Service, and forward-operating intelligence units. In 1949 the Military Sea Transport Service (the progenitor of the Military Sealift Command) was created, ensuring capable sealift forces would be retained and deployed in peacetime and reducing the Navy's reliance on the merchant marine for limited contingencies.⁵¹ This force not only addressed strategic sealift requirements, but also ensured that naval forces would have ready underway and afloat logistics (as opposed to slowly-surfing support forces). Many of these forces were forward-deployed and some were forward-homeported.

The Navy also fielded various forward-operating intelligence units, with "Naval Communications Units" operating following World War II from Port Lyautey, Morocco, and Sangley Point, Philippines.⁵² Electronic intelligence aircraft operating from these home bases conducted operations from forward staging points to cover targets throughout Europe, the Middle East, and the western Pacific. Given surging collection requirements and growing numbers of other U.S. naval forces operating forward, the first Fleet Intelligence Center was activated at Port Lyautey, Morocco, in March 1954.⁵³

While the grand majority of Navy intelligence gathering missions by aircraft, ships, and other assets were conducted covertly, a series of attacks on and seizures of Navy intelligence-gathering assets in international waters and airspace in the late 1960s drew significant public attention. In particular the 1967 seizure by North Korean forces of *Pueblo* (AGR-2), the 1967 attack by Israeli forces on *Liberty* (AGTR-5), and the 1968 shootdown by North Korean forces of an EC-121 reconnaissance aircraft were notably covered by the press.⁵⁴

In the 1970s, the Navy continued a strategy of forward-deploying combat-credible forces in groups of two carrier task forces and amphibious ready groups in both the

⁴⁹ Matthew S. Muehlbauer and David J. Ulbrich, *Ways of War: American Military History from the Colonial Era to the 21st Century* (London: Routledge Press, 2013), 423.

⁵⁰ Jeffrey G. Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals* (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, 1994); Seth Cropsey, Bryan G. McGrath, and Timothy A. Walton, *Sharpening the Spear: The Carrier, the Joint Force, and High-End Conflict* (Washington, DC: Hudson Institute, October 2015), 17.

⁵¹ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 72.

⁵² Wyman H. Packard, *A Century of U.S. Naval Intelligence* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 1996), 100.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁴ In 2001, following a collision with an aggressive PRC J-8 fighter in international airspace, a Lockheed EP-3E Aries II signals intelligence aircraft was landed in Hainan Island, China and Chinese forces seized the aircraft until its disassembled repatriation to the United States.

Mediterranean and western Pacific. However, under the command of Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, the Navy also planned to forward base those forces in the same regions.⁵⁵ In the Mediterranean, efforts to forward-base naval units in Italy and Greece progressed until political change in Greece and mounting budgetary limits constrained these initiatives. In the Pacific, however, starting in 1972, Japanese ports hosted a growing number of Seventh Fleet assets, including carrier and amphibious task forces. The homeporting of the carrier *Midway* (CVA-41) at Yokosuka in 1973 (and subsequent carriers) increased the credibility of extended deterrence over Japan and served as a bridge between the U.S. nuclear umbrella and Japan's non-nuclear policy.⁵⁶ Thus, the Seventh Fleet was forward-based, while the Sixth Fleet remained largely forward-deployed.

In the 1960s, growing Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean and receding British military power led observers to contend U.S. naval presence was wanting in the region.⁵⁷ In the early 1970s, in addition to its two hubs, the Navy began an intermittent but routine presence of carrier task forces in the Indian Ocean that grew to an almost permanent presence of carrier or surface combatant task forces by 1979.⁵⁸

The 1970s witnessed growth in the size and capability of the Soviet Navy, while the size of the Navy diminished from 885 ships in 1969 to 521 by 1981.⁵⁹ This decline notably included a major reduction in the number of aircraft carriers, amphibious ships, and submarines. Guided by Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union Sergey Gorshkov, the Soviet Navy underwent a major quantitative and qualitative expansion that sought to inhibit the ability of Navy forces (in particular CVBGs) to operate within strike range of the Soviet Union. New bombers armed with antiship cruise missiles (ASCMs), nuclear attack and guided missile submarines with ASCMs, and satellites contributed to a deepening "reconnaissance-strike" complex capable of effectively locating and striking U.S. CVBGs.

These growing threats began to manifest themselves in the late 1950s and 1960s. In the 1950s, Soviet bombers could effectively hold at risk Sixth Fleet assets in the Mediterranean. In response the Navy developed new air defense technologies and tactical deception methods, tested through the Haystack Exercises beginning in 1957.⁶⁰ The introduction of Soviet nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) in the late 1950s and SSNs armed with ASCMs in the 1960s again challenged Haystack tactics, forcing the Navy to devise new capabilities and new tactics under Project UPTIDE (Unified Pacific Fleet Project for Tactical Improvement and Data Extraction) for antisubmarine warfare groups (typically an ASW carrier, its air wing, and a destroyer squadron) to frustrate and

⁵⁵ Elmo Zumwalt, *On Watch* (New York, NY: *New York Times*, 1976), Chapter 6.

⁵⁶ Kotani, Tetsuo, "Presence and Credibility: Homeporting the USS *Midway* at Yokosuka," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 15 (1-2)(2008), 51–76.

⁵⁷ John E. Withrow, "Needed: A Credible Presence," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* Vol. 92/3/757 (March 1966).

⁵⁸ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 52.

⁵⁹ U.S. Navy Active Ship Force Levels, U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html>. Of note, even while the number of U.S. and Soviet forces operating near Soviet home waters and elsewhere increased, the 1972 Incidents at Sea Agreement provided tactical procedures and an arbitration mechanism that reduced the number and severity of confrontations between U.S. and Soviet naval forces.

⁶⁰ Robert G. Angevine, "Hiding in Plain Sight: The U.S. Navy and Dispersed Operations Under EMCON, 1956–1972," *Naval War College Review* 64 (2)(2011): 79–95.

defend against missile and torpedo attacks by enemy submarines within moving or static areas of high tactical interest.⁶¹

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Navy developed new methods to track and exploit the poor sensitivity of Soviet radar ocean-reconnaissance and electronic intelligence ocean reconnaissance satellites, so that large warships, such as aircraft carriers, could maneuver to avoid and if necessary present their smallest radar cross sections and minimize emissions as satellites passed overhead.⁶² Additionally, in the early 1980s the Navy developed new capabilities and concepts for long-range air defense, such as Outer Air Battle and the Aegis weapon system, to counter Soviet bombers and incorporated U.S. SSNs into CVBG operations to counter quiet Soviet SSNs and SSGNs. However, the growing number of these sophisticated threats, coupled with a period of decreased readiness in the Navy, presented major challenges in the 1970s and early 1980s.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan and Secretary of the Navy John Lehman proposed a 600-ship fleet. This fleet aimed to counter growing Soviet capability and capacity and ensure the Navy had sufficient capacity in peacetime to operate in multiple regions simultaneously. Consequently, peacetime operating forces significantly influenced the force size.

During the 1980s, the planned employment strategy of the “home fleets,” the Second and Third Fleets, increasingly took the form of multi-carrier operations off of Soviet Pacific strongholds and Scandinavia. In a series of exercises, the Navy trained to sustain the flow of reinforcements to Europe (and possibly some forces to Russia’s Pacific coast) during a conflict with the Soviet Union and conduct strikes from CVBGs in the northern Atlantic, eastern Mediterranean, and western Pacific. These aims were codified in the 1982 maritime strategy, elements of which were publicly released in 1986.⁶³

The 1980s witnessed the addition of a third forward deployment hub in the Arabian Sea, designed to counter Iranian threats in the vital waterway and ward off Soviet interference in the region. Although the Navy grew in the 1980s from 521 ships in 1981 to 594 in 1987, the addition of a third hub reduced the number of CVBGs normally forward in the other hubs from two to one.⁶⁴ The third hub also increased the number of Military Sealift Command prepositioning ships deployed to Diego Garcia.⁶⁵ Finally, the response of forward-deployed and home-based forces to numerous crises increased the length of ship deployments, leading to sailor dissatisfaction. In 1985, CNO Admiral James Watkins announced “a policy of six-month maximum peacetime deployments, thus setting a bound on deployments of combat-credible forces forward in the absence of war”—a policy that would be revised and greatly exceeded in the coming decades.⁶⁶

One technological change that reduced the level of forward deployment was the introduction of the long-range Trident SLBM. This new, longer-range missile reduced the need for forward-deployed support for SSBNs, and forward SSBN sites and tenders were gradually withdrawn, with Rota tenders withdrawing in 1979 and Holy Loch tenders in 1992.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Norman Friedman, *Seapower and Space: From the Dawn of the Missile Age to Net-Centric Warfare* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 195.

⁶³ James D. Watkins, “The Maritime Strategy,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (January 1986), 2–16.

⁶⁴ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 54.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

1978 CBO Report on Peacetime Presence

In 1978, Dov Zakheim and Andrew Hamilton released a Congressional Budget Office report on Navy peacetime presence.⁶⁷ The report astutely observed that although combat-credible Navy overseas presence centered on CVBGs was a key aspect of U.S. political relationships with many of its overseas allies, the mission placed a substantial demand on naval forces and budgets.⁶⁸

The report identified that, regardless of wartime need, a minimum of 12 operational carrier battle groups was required to meet Navy peacetime missions of two CVBGs at each of two hubs. The report also identified an excessive concentration of the Navy's offensive striking power in carrier platforms and their airwings that required a large number of other defensive platforms to increase their survivability.⁶⁹

By contrast, U.S. aims in the Indian Ocean and the Middle East would likely not require CVBGs, but could instead be met with "lower-value forces" that would be less costly to procure and maintain, such as land-based aircraft to perform naval missions or landing helicopter assault ships or smaller conventional carriers with vertical/short take-off and landing aircraft.⁷⁰ This approach could also be applied to the permanent deployment of CVBGs to the eastern Mediterranean given the threat posed by bomber bases in the Soviet Union. Other alternatives to the Navy's posture included homeporting an additional carrier overseas (thus reducing the number of carriers required to support forward deployments) and moving to a flexible, as opposed to a permanent, deployment pattern.

Overall, the report foresaw the dilution of naval power as a third hub emerged and recommended consideration of alternatives that facilitated a more regionally-tailored, economical, and flexible approach to presence and crisis-response requirements than currently available, which "uniformly call for carrier forces in all regions."⁷¹ Many of the report's concerns and alternatives apply today.

D. 1990s and Early 2000s

The fall of the Soviet Union and changes in the global environment led to significant adjustment in Navy deployment strategy. Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait and subsequent U.S. operations in the region increased Navy forward deployments in the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf. In 1995 the Navy reestablished the Fifth Fleet, with its headquarters in Bahrain.⁷² Although the headquarters was forward-based, the majority of the fleet's combatant ships were forward-deployed from the United States. Although the Navy adopted the goal of maintaining three hubs in the Pacific, Mediterranean, and Arabian Sea/Persian Gulf, declining force levels (with the force shrinking to 337 active ships by

⁶⁷ Dov Zakheim and Andrew Hamilton, *U.S. Naval Forces: The Peacetime Presence Mission* (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office, December 1978), <https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/95th-congress-1977-1978/reports/78-cbo-044.pdf>.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, i.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 40–41.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Barbara Starr, "U.S. Fifth Fleet Reborn for Active Duty in the Persian Gulf," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 27 May 1995, 11.

2001) and the reallocation of forces to other theaters frequently resulted in major presence gaps—in particular, CVBG presence.

The 1993 Department of Defense (DOD) Bottom-Up Review (BUR) aimed to restructure military forces for the post–Cold War era. The review sought to address the “dangers posed by nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction; regional dangers; dangers to democracy and reform; and economic dangers.”⁷³ A near-simultaneous two major regional conflict (informed by the threats posed by Iraq and North Korea) served as the lead force-sizing and shaping construct, with peace enforcement and “Intervention Operations” as the second set of operations that would size and shape forces.⁷⁴

Recommending a fleet of 346 ships (including 11 active aircraft carriers, 1 reserve/training aircraft carrier, and 45–55 attack submarines), the BUR asserted that peacetime overseas presence needs, especially for aircraft carriers, could exceed those needed to win two major regional contingencies (MRC). Recognizing the utility of naval combatants to conduct a range of non-MRC missions, the review force structure was “sized to reflect the exigencies of overseas presence, as well as the warfighting requirements of MRCs.”⁷⁵

The BUR’s assumptions and recommendations came under critical review, with observers commenting that the review’s force structure was unaffordable under the William J. Clinton administration’s proposed defense budget. Increased engagement and peace enforcement and intervention operations would stretch thin forces obligated for MRCs (especially as the fleet shrunk compared to the Cold War), and combatant commanders questioned assumptions and strategic enabler capacities in the plan to respond to two near-simultaneous MRCs.⁷⁶

The Navy informed and supported the incorporation of forward presence as a Navy-unique leading force-sizing criterion in the 1993 BUR.⁷⁷ Additionally, as threats to Navy sea control declined, the Navy emphasized its power projection capabilities across the range of operations and argued that its combat-credible forward deployment strategy was its principal force-sizing criterion and organizing concept.⁷⁸ Its 1994 service operational concept *Forward . . . From the Sea* articulated the value of forward-deployed and based power projection forces,⁷⁹ and the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) similarly asserted that “the demands associated with maintaining overseas presence play a

⁷³ Les Aspin, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, October 1993), http://www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/Reading_Room/Other/515.pdf, 2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷⁶ Steven Sternlieb, Sharon Pickup, William Wood, Barbara Gannon, Samuel Hinojosa, and Nancy Ragsdale, *Bottom-Up Review: Analysis of Key DOD Assumptions* (Washington, DC: United States General Accounting Office, GAO/NSIAD-95-56, January 1995); Baker Spring, John Luddy and Larence DiRita, *Thumbs Down to the Bottom-Up Review* (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, 24 September 1993), <http://www.heritage.org/defense/report/thumbs-down-the-bottom-review>.

⁷⁷ Sam J. Tangredi, “The Rise and Fall of Naval Forward Presence,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (May 2000), 28–33.

⁷⁸ Philip A. Dur, “Presence: Forward, Ready, Engaged,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (June 1994), 41–44.

⁷⁹ Jay L. Johnson, *Forward . . . From the Sea: The Navy Operational Concept* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, March 1997).

significant role in determining the size of our naval forces.”⁸⁰ Some observers commented that this combat-credible forward presence-based argument enabled the Navy to “win” the inter-service rivalry battle of the 1997 QDR, “by being able to fend off any potential further cuts to the centerpieces of its force structure—aircraft carriers.”⁸¹

In terms of naval force posture, the BUR identified the goal of being able to maintain a carrier strike group (CSG) and amphibious ready group (ARG) more or less continuously off Southwest Asia, Northeast Asia, and Europe (in the Mediterranean); however, in order to reduce the length of deployments while shrinking the force, the review identified “ways to fill gaps in carrier presence or to supplement our posture even when carriers are present” with ARGs, Tomahawk-launching cruisers, destroyers, and submarines, and land-based maritime patrol aircraft.⁸²

During the 1990s, the Navy greatly increased its support of military operations other than war around the world as well as its deployment of forces for partnership-building deployments off Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia. These operations and frequent combat operations employed Navy and other service forces at higher rates than anticipated by the BUR, leading to the reallocation of research, development, and acquisition funding to operations and maintenance accounts.

During this period, there were calls for experimental fleet battle exercises that mirrored those of the interwar years, and the Navy did conduct some fleet battle experiments and joint fleet exercises. However, these exercises—conducted in addition to a variety of forward-presence activities that demanded a large portion of the shrinking fleet’s available time—resulted in them largely transforming into work-up exercises that prepared fleet units for elements of forward deployment.⁸³

During the 1990s, the Navy’s repair ship and destroyer tender forces were eliminated, and the forward submarine tender force significantly cut, as most repair responsibilities shifted back to bases in the United States.⁸⁴ Throughout the Cold War, intermediate-level maintenance and repair increasingly became a function of forward-based and homeland-based depots ashore. By the 1990s, the Navy’s mobile logistics force (with the exception of the Combat Logistics Force underway replenishment assets) atrophied. Beginning with the deployment of prepositioning ships to Diego Garcia in 1981, the Afloat Prepositioning Force permanently forward-deployed ships with equipment and supplies (largely for Marine Corps, Army, and Air Force requirements) for immediate offloading in contingencies. Overall, this trend reduced the ability of the Navy to conduct forward or transoceanic operations independent of land bases.

In the early 2000s, the Navy continued a deployment strategy of forward-deploying combat-credible forces, albeit in two-and-a-half rather than three hubs, with the Mediterranean receiving a de facto “half-hub” status as ongoing combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq drew a greater proportion of naval forces and the size of the fleet continued to shrink.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Tangredi.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Aspin.

⁸³ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 82–83.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 91.

⁸⁵ U.S. Navy Active Ship Force Levels, U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html>.

Service strategies further elevated the role of combat-credible forward presence. The 2007 Department of the Navy and Coast Guard strategy, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, identified it as a distinct strategic advantage for the nation, the aegis of the global economic system, and an essential feature to prevent wars in addition to winning them.⁸⁶ In 2015 a revised maritime strategy titled *Forward, Engaged, Ready: A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* continued to highlight forward presence as an enabler of deterrence, rapid crisis response, partner training, and maritime security.⁸⁷ Additionally the revised strategy explicitly named “challenges” from China, Russia, and Iran as reasons to maintain combat-credible forward presence to deter, and if necessary, defeat aggression.

Yet even during this period, the ever-increasing demand for forward presence was significantly outpacing forces available. In Congressional testimony, Vice Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, declared that “it is no secret that our current resources of 316 ships are fully deployed and in many cases stretched thin to meet the growing national security demands,” and commentators bemoaned the “tyrannical hold” of presence that threatened to break Navy readiness.⁸⁸

II. The Current State of Forward Presence

More than a quarter century since the end of the Cold War, the United States still follows the same Cold War approach to forward presence. It persistently forward deploys and bases major combat-credible units in two to three hubs. Although the pattern of deployments has changed, with more forces allocated to the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf and fewer to the Atlantic and Mediterranean, the fundamental deployment strategy remains the same. All the while, the Navy has contributed to large and small ongoing combat operations around the world and fielded other independent deploying assets to do engagement, crisis response, and short term surges.⁸⁹

Peter Swartz contends that the major factors that drive determination of deployment strategy include: the international environment, the domestic environment and strategic outlook, and technological innovation.⁹⁰ Arguably, all three have changed in a way that would suggest a need to reevaluate deployment strategy in general and forward presence in particular.

Challenges to Current Forward Presence

The growth and spread of precision strike capabilities and the cost of modes of forward operation call into question both the value and sustainability of the current U.S. approach to naval forward presence. A growing number of precision strike capabilities

⁸⁶ James Conway, Gary Roughead, and Thad Allen, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 2015), 21.

⁸⁷ Joseph Dunford, Jonathan Greenert, and Paul Zunkunft, *Forward, Engaged Ready: A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 2015), 9.

⁸⁸ Conrad C. Lautenbacher, “House Armed Services Committee on Shipbuilding Statement,” Subcommittee on Procurement, 106th Cong., 1st sess., 29 February 2000 ; Daniel Goure, “The Tyranny of Forward Presence,” *Naval War College Review* 54 (3)(2001), 11–24.

⁸⁹ Whiteneck, et al, *The Navy at a Tipping Point*, 14.

⁹⁰ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 114.

can hold forward-operating fleet assets at risk. These capabilities apply to adversaries such as China, Russia, and Iran, but also increasingly (albeit at lower levels of scale and sophistication) to smaller states and nonstate actors. Most notably, the People’s Republic of China has developed antiship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) capable of engaging surface ships at ranges exceeding 2,000 nautical miles.⁹¹ These threats are complimented by Chinese and Russian aircraft, surface ships, and submarines that can fire a variety of missiles and torpedoes, and multi-phenomenology integrated surveillance and targeting complexes that challenge American counterintelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance efforts—especially for forward operating vessels. While U.S. undersea superiority has long been regarded as a major advantage in potential contingencies, improvements in Chinese and Russian antisubmarine warfare capabilities may also threaten submarine operations in forward areas.⁹²

Analyzing these trends, a 2015 RAND Corporation report concluded that:

over the next five to 15 years, if U.S. and PLA forces remain on roughly current trajectories, Asia will witness a progressively receding frontier of U.S. dominance. . . . PLA forces will become more capable of establishing temporary local air and naval superiority at the outset of a conflict. In certain regional contingencies, this temporal or local superiority might enable the PLA to achieve limited objectives without ‘defeating’ U.S. forces.⁹³

The growing effectiveness of Chinese and Russian military forces may lead them to believe they can rapidly achieve campaign objectives and possibly even deter American intervention—especially if conducted in a low-intensity “gray zone warfare” manner. Conversely, these trends may undercut the combat credibility of U.S. forces to allies, diminishing the reassurance aims of forward-deployed capital units.

Overall, the Navy faces a range of threats that significantly exceed the scale and sophistication of those envisioned in the 1993 Bottom-Up Review and subsequent analyses that sized a Navy to defeat regional aggressors with “100–200 naval vessels, primarily patrol craft armed with surface-to-surface missiles, and up to 50 submarines.”⁹⁴ The Navy’s 2016 Force Structure Assessment called for 355 ships, in part based on the expectation that the force would suffer additional losses in conflict against a peer or near peer adversary. Of note, the 355 ship total was the “minimum force structure to comply with [Pentagon] strategic guidance” and was not the “desired” force size the Navy would

⁹¹ Harry J. Kazianis, “China’s DF-26 Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile: What Does the Pentagon Really Think?,” *The National Interest*, 18 May 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/chinas-df-26-anti-ship-ballistic-missile-what-does-the-16260>.

⁹² Lyle J. Goldstein, “China’s New Missile-Torpedo May Curb U.S. Submarine Power,” *The National Interest*, 16 August 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/its-missile-its-torpedo-its-chinas-new-anti-submarine-weapon-17374>.

⁹³ Eric Heginbotham, et al, *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996–2017* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015), xxxvi, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR300/RR392/RAND_RR392.pdf.

⁹⁴ Aspin, 15.

pursue if resources were not a constraint, which would be a 653-ship fleet to meet all global presence and warfighting requirements with minimal risk.⁹⁵

Current forward presence models also face another challenge: The fiscal and opportunity costs of current modes of operation and the cost of the fleet are difficult to sustain. In the post–Cold War environment, the demand for naval forces has significantly increased. In the 1990s, the Navy did not reap a “peace dividend,” as it conducted “persistent operations in the Balkans, the Caribbean, and the Persian Gulf after Desert Storm, continued its role in Asia, and expanded its peacetime engagement as COCOMs [combat commands] increased ‘shaping’ activities.”⁹⁶ After 9/11, the Navy decreased its role in the Balkans and Caribbean but dramatically increased its homeland defense and ballistic missile defense roles, conducted major operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and adopted new humanitarian assistance, maritime partnership building, littoral combat, and special operational forces missions. Overall, the Navy battle force has shrunk, while the number of ships on deployment has remained relatively steady and the Navy has increased its forward presence missions.⁹⁷ To achieve this, the number of ships undergoing maintenance or underway in the continental United States for training has decreased (with deleterious effects on readiness to conduct high-intensity operations against adversaries) and the length and frequency of deployments have increased (resulting in a reduction in time available for maintenance, a reduction in the time available for training, and negative impacts on morale).⁹⁸ Demand for additional naval forces in the European theater (in the North Atlantic and Mediterranean) to deter Russian aggression and hold at risk Russian or Syrian forces threatens to significantly increase demands on naval forces, absent a concomitant major reduction in naval forces elsewhere.

Although Navy leadership has hoped for a respite from operations to “reset” the force, the current national commitment to forward-deploying naval forces, centered around major fleet units, makes this challenging.⁹⁹ In a sense, the Navy has fallen victim to its own success in promoting and executing forward-deployed combat-credible naval forces, with insatiable demand for more naval forces forward exceeding available supply. This imbalance applies not only to aircraft carriers, but even to amphibious forces, such

⁹⁵ Sam LaGrone and Megan Eckstein, “Navy Wants to Grow Fleet to 355 Ships; 47 Hull Increase Adds Destroyers, Attack Subs,” *USNI News*, 16 December 2016, <https://news.usni.org/2016/12/16/navy-wants-grow-fleet-355-ships-47-hull-increase-previous-goal>.

⁹⁶ Whiteneck, et al, *The Navy at a Tipping Point*, 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁸ Navy and other DOD planners face a three sided, zero-sum tradeoff in setting the cycle length of major combatants. “They must balance the goals of the deploying [ships] and generating forward presence, holding [ships] in reserve and keeping them surge-ready to meet emerging needs, and maintaining the materiel condition of the ships.” (Roland J. Yardley, James G. Kallimani, John F. Schank, and Clifford A. Grammich, *Increasing Aircraft Carrier Forward Presence: Changing the Length of the Maintenance Cycle* [Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, W74V8H-06-C-0002, 2008.]

⁹⁹ Of note, the 1958 Defense Reorganization Act removed the CNO from the operational chain of command and the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act further reduced the influence of the CNO in the deployment and employment of naval forces. Currently, the Navy must meet the forward presence requirements defined by the annual Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of Defense–approved, Global Force Management Allocation Plan that authorizes force allocations and deployment of forces in support of combatant commander requirements. (U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Logistics Agency, “Instruction: Global Force Management [GFM],” effective 5 February 2014, 9, www.dla.mil/issuances/Documents/i3000.03.pdf.)

as expeditionary strike groups, that are increasingly requested to not only counter major adversaries, but also to provide additional forward presence for engagement and counter-nonstate actor operations in the littorals.¹⁰⁰

Whereas the tempo of current operations strains the force, the Navy also faces another challenge: the continued decline in the size of its fleet. Since the 1980s, it has continued to shrink, almost without interruption, to 275 ships in 2017.¹⁰¹ Although the Navy aims to grow the fleet in its shipbuilding plans, it is unclear it will receive adequate shipbuilding funds to achieve those goals. Per the Congressional Budget Office, the Fiscal Year 2016 30-Year Shipbuilding Plan would be 32 percent more expensive than the Navy's historical average annual shipbuilding budgets,¹⁰² and if it received an average annual shipbuilding budget of \$16 billion (its recent historical average), the fleet inventory would decrease to 251 ships by 2044.¹⁰³ Even amid the decline in the size of the fleet, concern has been raised that the Navy has inadequately emphasized investments in modernization and readiness essential to ensuring forces are effective in combat against peer or near-peer adversaries. In a 2015 memorandum, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter chastised Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus that the Department of the Navy budget had "overemphasized resources used to incrementally increase total ship numbers [thus aiding the maintenance of forward presence] at the expense of critically-needed investments" for warfighting.¹⁰⁴ Absent major growth in the size of the fleet, these fiscal and operational dynamics present the Navy with a difficult choice: reduce forward presence to increase readiness at home or continue with the current course that risks undermining readiness and combat capability.

Options for Navy Force Planning

Naval forces can continue to play major roles in addressing U.S. national security challenges. While current forward deployment models appear unsustainable for operational and fiscal reasons, there are force planning options that can adjust naval capabilities, posture, and forces as appropriate. This essay examines three classes of primary options: status quo, status quo-plus, and withdrawal that relies on range.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ David Anderson, "Naval forward presence: The future threat looms in the many littoral nations that are fragile, at-risk states," *Marine Corps Gazette* 91 (12)(2007), 64–8.

¹⁰¹ "Status of the Navy," U.S. Navy, http://www.navy.mil/navydata/nav_legacy.asp?id=146.

¹⁰² Eric Labs, *An Analysis of the Navy's Fiscal Year 2016 Shipbuilding Plan* (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office, October 2015), 3.

¹⁰³ Eric Labs, *Preserving the Navy's Forward Presence With a Smaller Fleet* (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office, March 2015).

¹⁰⁴ Ashton Carter, "Navy Program Balance," Secretary of Defense Memorandum for Secretary of the Navy, 14 December 2015, accessed via "Document: Budget Directive Letter from SECDEF Carter to SECNAV Mabus," *USNI News*, 17 December 2015, <https://news.usni.org/2015/12/17/document-budget-directive-letter-from-secdef-carter-to-secnave-mabus>.

¹⁰⁵ In his examination of Navy deployment strategy, Peter Swartz identifies seven deployment strategy models that the Navy could adopt: 1) Combat-credible forward presence in hubs (the current model); 2) combat and diplomatic surge readiness; 3) Global Forward Military Operations Other than War; 4) Cruising; 5) Experimentation; 6) Homeland Defense; and 7) Composite Model. (Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 114.) Daniel Whiteneck and his colleagues identified five options in their study: 1) a 2-hub option (that drastically limited other area engagement missions); 2) a 1+ hub option (that maintained a single hub and continued to perform engagement and ballistic missile defense (BMD) missions in other areas); 3) a shaping option (that focused on engagement activities and BMD stations and maintained a small combat fleet); 4) a surge option (that discontinued persistent presence missions by CSG/ESGs, but rather would

The nation could choose to continue to pursue the status quo option for Navy deployment strategy and force structure. Under this option, easy to implement bureaucratically and politically (both domestically and internationally), the nation would continue to follow the same deployment strategy developed in the Cold War. Innovations to the current approach could seek to “optimize” to maintain forward presence with a smaller fleet by increasing the length and frequency of deployments, basing more ships overseas, or rotating crews.¹⁰⁶

However, this approach would ultimately whistle past the graveyard. It would accept greater risk as the number of forces available forward decline due to the shrinking fleet and as growing strains on the fleet to maintain forces forward presence reduce readiness. Additionally, this approach would likely suffer from reduced combat credibility. Over time many classes of forward-deployed naval forces could be held at greater degrees of risk by adversaries.¹⁰⁷ This would undermine deterrence and reassurance objectives. It might even encourage opportunistic aggression by adversaries, since forward-deployed units organized around CSGs and ESGs would neither be well suited to effectively counter low-intensity gray zone aggression nor be effectively suited to respond in mass with a surge force to counter high-intensity aggression because the readiness of forward-deployed forces would be prioritized over forces in the United States.

In a “status quo plus” option, the nation would continue to deploy combat-credible forces forward, but to reduce their vulnerability, it would employ alternative force packages and concepts. This could include the use of large-deck amphibious ships or smaller carriers to substitute for CVNs or the incorporation of additional offensive weapons on surface combatants, both efforts to disperse the combat potential of the fleet among a greater number of forces. Leveraging concepts such as distributed lethality and electromagnetic maneuver warfare, it would seek to create a resilient force that would still conduct operations forward.

Without the participation of CVN-based carrier air wings (CVW), this force may, however, lack the requisite firepower to effectively defend surface forces or conduct sustained offensive operations. Additionally, if counter-intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) efforts were not as effective as desired, then the forward operation of the dispersed fleet could make it vulnerable to destruction in detail.

A third option is to withdraw from forward presence and rely on long-range strike capabilities, both within and without the Navy. Reducing the forward presence of major fleet units, such as CSGs, would decrease their risk to detection and destruction. The fleet could leverage long-range CVW aircraft and missiles to launch powerful strikes before withdrawing once more to a safer area.

This approach might be effective for high-intensity strike and sea denial operations; however, absent complementary lower campaign value forward-operating forces it would suffer difficulty demonstrating presence in a region or addressing low-

focus on continental United States training and surge to conflict when needed and would conduct periodic cruises to show the flag); and 5) a shrinking status quo option (that would “salami slice” forces allocated to missions as pressures increase). Whiteneck, et al, *The Navy at a Tipping Point*, 23.

¹⁰⁶ Labs, *Preserving the Navy’s Forward Presence With a Smaller Fleet*.

¹⁰⁷ Potential gaps include not only difficulty countering threat capabilities, but also countering threat capacity as defense of forward-operating naval forces may require very high munitions expenditure rates.

intensity gray zone threats. Additionally, unless sufficient numbers of relatively expensive, long-range munitions were procured, high munitions expenditure rates would be difficult to sustain over the course of a campaign.

An Alternative Approach to Forward Presence

All three classes of primary options face significant limitations. Instead, the nation requires a deployment strategy that distinguishes between the different peacetime and wartime tasks naval forces conduct and a force structure that matches these demands. Inextricably linked in effective strategic planning, both force posture and force structure must be tailored to current and future challenges.

Squadrons of forward-deployed forces would focus on peacetime presence, deterrence, assurance, and warfighting missions. These forces would consist of lower vulnerability assets (such as submarines) and lower campaign value assets (such as smaller surface combatants and various kinds of unmanned systems), yet would be able to reassure allies and deter weak adversaries. During a major conflict, these peacetime forces would be capable of conducting offensive operations for operationally-relevant periods of time. Guided by new operational concepts and grouped into force packages, this force would not be capable of assured defense of allies, but would be capable of significantly delaying or disrupting adversary aggression (instead of serving as a mere tripwire).¹⁰⁸ Some elements of these forces could include new heterogeneous architectures of manned-unmanned systems of systems, including patrol boats, frigates, submarines, and unmanned sensors and surface and undersea vehicles, that would be capable of holding adversary maritime forces at risk or providing long-endurance surveillance and targeting for standoff forces at low cost. When forward-deployed sea-based aviation assets are necessary, they would be fielded from large-deck amphibious ships and surface ships, not aircraft carriers. Non-low signature forward-operating forces would be expected to suffer relatively high attrition rates in a sudden, high-intensity conflict.

In such a conflict, surviving forward-deployed forces would complement the large surging warfighting force. This force would focus on multi-carrier, cross-domain, high-end warfare and would incorporate a mix of standoff and stand-in capabilities (such as CSGs with long-range CVWs, surface ships with standoff missiles, and submarines) and would have the requisite mass to conduct sustained operations from multiple, geographically distant axes. To ensure that a requisite number of surge forces would be capable of responding in an operationally-relevant period of time, a portion of the surge force would conduct fleet exercises and occasional cruises. The rest of the force would be maintained in the homeland at relatively high states of readiness.

Critical to the combined fleet would be a robust and redundant defense-industrial base capable of developing and supporting the fleet in peacetime and rapidly expanding production of defense platforms and systems in wartime to sustain a potential protracted, high attrition conflict.

In many respects, this bifurcated force posture would mimic the fleet's interwar period deployment strategy. The surge fleet would conduct "recurrent large-scale exercises in home waters [. . .] undistracted by the pull of a different actual peacetime

¹⁰⁸ Robert C. Rubel, "Straight Talk on Forward Presence," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* Vol. 141/3/1, 345 (March 2015).

employment strategy.”¹⁰⁹ In contrast, however, to the Asiatic Fleet, forward-operating forces would have sufficient striking power to delay or disrupt adversary operations.

In 2016 the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments conducted a Congressionally-directed alternative fleet architecture study that generated a geographically tailored force similar to the one proposed.¹¹⁰ As discussed, the study divided forces into a forward-operating and geographically-tailored deterrence force and a surging maneuver force. Forces operated forward throughout the western Pacific, Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf, Mediterranean and North Atlantic, Africa, and Central and South America. To ensure credible coverage, the proposed fleet’s total battle force consisted of 366 ships (408 if patrol vessels are counted).¹¹¹

The challenges to developing a new force structure and posture are likely to be both budgetary and social. Budgetarily, a number of studies, to include the Navy’s 2016 Force Structure Assessment and CSBA’s study, recommend growing the Navy to or past 350 ships. However, the nation may not devote the requisite level of funding to grow the fleet.¹¹² For instance, the average annual cost to procure CSBA’s proposed alternative fleet architecture (including the wartime Combat Logistics Force) is \$23.6 billion, 20 percent greater than the Obama administration’s President’s Budget (PB) 2017 plan.¹¹³ The operations and maintenance costs associated with the proposed fleet architecture plan will cost an average of \$16.5 billion per year, 14 percent more than the PB 2017 level.¹¹⁴

Further, the United States has acculturated friends and adversaries to equate forward presence with commitment and CSGs as the primary sign of commitment. This situation places the United States in a delicate balance maintaining adequate levels of presence and combat credibility. Additionally, as the Navy fields more unmanned vehicles or other lower signature forces, it may face difficulty deterring adversaries or reassuring allies using these new platforms—especially if they are usually unseen. Additionally, lacking humans, unmanned systems may not pose the same tripwire barriers to adversaries, who may be comfortable neutralizing these systems with lowered expectations of escalation.

Nonetheless, an alternative Navy force posture and structure can be pursued and implemented. The Navy and senior DOD leaders should clearly articulate the need for higher overall defense and Navy budgets to develop Navy force structures and postures properly aligned with threats and opportunities. The Navy’s post-1970 budgets have remained flat in real terms as a percentage of gross domestic product, while continually-

¹⁰⁹ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 2.

¹¹⁰ Section 1067 of the 2016 National Defense Authorization Act directed the Secretary of Defense to commission three separate studies to define future fleet architectures for the 2030 timeframe: one by an internal Navy group, one by a Federally Funded Research and Development Center, and one by a non-profit think tank. The Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Assessment Division (N81), the MITRE Corporation, and the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments were chosen to conduct the studies.

¹¹¹ 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: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2017), 111.

¹¹² Kirkland Donald, Jonathan Altman, and Jon Solomon, “The U.S. Navy’s Role In Ensuring 21st Century American Security And Prosperity,” *Real Clear Defense*, 16 March 2017, http://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/03/16/navy_21st_century_american_security_and_prosperity_110980.html.

¹¹³ Clark, et al, *Restoring American Seapower*, 111.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

increasing portions of the Navy budget are consumed by non-research and development, procurement, or maintenance costs.¹¹⁵ Absent a larger budget and reform of growing costs that do not contribute to military effectiveness, the Navy may be forced into a situation similar to that of early 20th century Great Britain, in which the Royal Navy reoriented its posture to meet the German threat in the North Sea, leaving the western Atlantic and eastern Pacific to the United States.¹¹⁶ In the 21st century, there is not a suitably capable, benevolent great power on the horizon.

Furthermore, even if the Navy's budget does not increase to the level required to procure and sustain the full alternative force structures (and it is essential that they increase), the proposed bifurcated deployment strategy could still be implemented by forces to varying degrees.

Additionally, dedicated alliance and partner engagement efforts and strategic signaling to adversaries would be critical to accustom states to combat-credible non-CSG forward-operating naval forces. Cognizant of the enormous initial alliance management challenges associated with this approach, with the right level of engagement, such an approach could overcome initial ally and partner concerns and result in an even more credible force, since both allies and partners and adversaries would recognize the operationally-superior combat performance and availability of the new force.

Strategic communication would convey that the force posture of this bifurcated fleet would not be a withdrawal from the region, but rather a growth in forward-operating low-signature and low-campaign value forces (that would likely result in a significant net increase in the total number of assets operating forward—many of them unmanned) and a repositioning of higher signature forces to an optimal deterrence and warfighting areas. Moreover, during the transition period from the current status quo deployment strategy to the new deterrence force/maneuver force strategy, uncertainty regarding U.S. operational capabilities in both forces (some of which would be unknown or poorly understood by adversaries) could significantly contribute to deterrence since that uncertainty could “tip cost/benefit calculations in favor of restraint.”¹¹⁷

III. Conclusion

Change in Navy deployment strategy has been constant. While the Navy has always had a forward presence, the character of that presence has adapted to fluctuations in the domestic power and interests of the United States, the global environment, and technological capabilities.¹¹⁸ Today, the nation faces changes in its domestic power with the prospect of new defense budgets, changes in the global environment with great power adversaries, capable regional actors, and nonstate actors all threatening it in different ways, and technological innovation on the part of adversaries and the United States alike that present major threats and opportunities.

¹¹⁵ Kirkland, et al.

¹¹⁶ Daniel Whiteneck, Michael Price, Neil Jenkins, and Peter Swartz, *The Navy at a Tipping Point: Maritime Dominance at Stake?* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 2010), 24.

¹¹⁷ Michael Gerson and Daniel Whiteneck, *Deterrence and Influence: The Navy's Role in Preventing War* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, CRM D0019315.A4/1Rev, March 2009), 35.

¹¹⁸ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, 124.

A new force structure and posture strategy would address these major changes. In evaluating the strategic effectiveness of the alternative forward deployment strategy, three fundamental questions must be posed: how to measure presence; what is it that allies and friends pay attention to; and what is it that competitors pay attention to?

Careful examination by Navy leaders and policymakers would identify the proposed strategy's virtues. It would also recognize the capabilities and limitations of these naval forces. In particular, naval forces—even forward-deployed and present deterrence forces—may be limited in their ability to shape adversaries.¹¹⁹ Accordingly, shaping operations should be carefully evaluated and specifically targeted. Similarly, for some forms of aggression, including some gray zone warfare actions, the Navy may not be the best proactive or reactive U.S. government organization. Instead, whole-of-government efforts or efforts drawing on the capabilities of other organizations may be more effective. Lastly, it is likely that changing Chinese and Russian deployment patterns (including Chinese forward deployment in the Indian Ocean) will require further evolutions in U.S. deployment strategy.¹²⁰ A fleet that has the flexibility to tailor its forces forward and husband its power can more effectively respond to these challenges.

The continuation of a 70-year-old deployment strategy is an historical aberration, and it is increasingly operationally and strategically ineffective. The United States must adopt new, tailored approaches that employ more of the right forces forward for both peace and war and hold more of the right forces further back for employment in war. An approach that deploys differentiated deterrence and maneuver forces sets the Navy and the nation on a course for success.

¹¹⁹ Edward Rhodes, Jonathan DiCicco, Milburn Moore Sarah, and Tom Walker, "Forward Presence and Engagement: Historical Insights into the Problem of 'Shaping'," *Naval War College Review* 53 (1)(2001), 25–61.

¹²⁰ As a potential historical parallel, in the 1960s, Admiral Gorshkov led the Soviet Navy into the "World Ocean" with "forward deployments" of assets. While this strategy did not fundamentally change U.S. deployment strategy, it did lead to the reallocation of forces across theaters and increased the threat faced by U.S. forces in some scenarios. In contrast to the Soviet Union, however, China's significantly larger comprehensive national power and multifaceted engagement with the world may pose a much greater threat. Please see: Gary Charbonneau, "The Soviet Navy and Forward Deployments," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (Vol. 105/3/913, March 1979).