

American Sea Power in the Contemporary Security Environment

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This paper highlights the conceptual building blocks of sea power and maritime strategy and its implementation by maritime forces, within the context of a joint force. The first section describes the roots of American maritime strategy and naval power. The following section summarizes the strategic issues that faced the Navy during the post-Cold War period. The final section identifies contemporary geostrategic challenges confronting the U.S. armed forces in the Baltic, Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, and East and South China Seas and how sea power can contribute to the joint effort of pursuing U.S. national interests. The evolving geopolitical environment speaks to the enduring imperatives of U.S. maritime power. The U.S. Navy has long been the backbone of U.S. global influence and leadership, and as much as new technology may alter the face of war to come, geography and its maritime aspect remain unchanging. Ageless therefore is the necessity for this nation to project significant power in maritime forces throughout the world's oceans. Four truths of sea power are manifest here. First, the U.S. Navy must preserve its ability to apply American power in the littoral waters of the leading theaters of geopolitical conflict to deter adversaries during crises, and, if necessary, as an element of the joint force, defeat them in a war. Second, the U.S. Navy must organize itself around sensible strategic concepts that complement the joint force, provide for the security of the nation, its interests, and its allies, and that accord with the needs and ends of policy as a whole in its domestic and external aspects. Absent sound strategic principles, the Navy may fall victim to conflicting goals and organizational decline, which has happened frequently in the past and must not be allowed to happen now on the cusp of a much-needed regeneration of U.S. sea power. The Navy must do all it can within the American government and before America's citizens to argue this case, one which is ignored or simply taken for granted by too many at great peril until it is too late. Third, in light of the changing international security environment, naval forces have become more important to enabling the entire joint force. Greater awareness within the defense community of the growing relative importance of modern maritime capabilities to supporting army and air force commanded campaigns is needed. Finally, the Navy must organize itself in its fighting line and in all the subsidiary structures to support this strategic concept. These three truths of sea power form the basis for sound strategy at sea and must be kept constantly in the forefront of the present debate about the size, shape, and composition of the Navy's force structure. The challenge for strategists today, as in previous eras, is to determine how best to anticipate the changing global strategic landscape so that American naval strategy, and the slower to change Navy force structure, can remain connected with emerging threats and national strategy.

