

# CSBA

Center for Strategic and  
Budgetary Assessments

## **U.S. Maritime Strategy: The Factors that Shape it... and its Future**

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## Part I: Understanding “Maritime Strategy”

- *What do I mean when I say “maritime strategy” or “maritime thinking”?*

## Part II: Understanding American Naval Thinking

- *What national and institutional factors influence the likelihood and the structure of a U.S. maritime strategy?*

## Part III: Understanding the U.S. Navy’s Maritime Strategies

- *What were the purposes and the ideas that undergird the Navy’s maritime strategies of the 1980s and 2007/2015?*

## Part IV: The Future of a Comprehensive U.S. Maritime Strategy

- *Given the above, what would a comprehensive U.S. maritime strategy look like (in peace and in war) and what should the U.S. Navy do?*

Note: all quotes in the brief are from author’s *Towards a New Maritime Strategy: American Naval Thinking in the Post-Cold War Era* (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute, July 2015).

A Maritime Strategy...

- “Is well-suited to the interests of a state [like the United States] whose prosperity and security interests have always been linked to and depended upon the vitality of the world economy, and to the free markets, open societies, and democratic politics that have (so far) accompanied sustained economic success.”
- “Has always been more directly concerned with the relationship between the state and global markets than those associated with land or air power.
- “Ties economic, political, and security interests, and offers a holistic, less militarized and threat-centric worldview.”
- “Takes full account of the strategic importance of wealth accumulation and distribution”—particularly among alliances.
- Ensures access to resources, markets, lines of production, partners, and battlefields—as well as to deny the enemy the same.

*“The surest path to victory in any global conflict ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ is to conduct yourself so as to insure that the rich countries and critical resource areas of the world end up on your side. This has been the essence of maritime strategy since the Age of Sail, and there is no reason to expect the pattern to change anytime soon.” - Dan Moran*

American Strategic Culture:

- The bomb obviated the need for the U.S. to develop an excellence in systemic management, and rooted a hyper-rationalist and ahistorical way of strategic thinking.
  - U.S. strategy fixated on the Soviet threat, balance of military power, and deterring a hot war; it became extremely threat-centric.
- Defense leaders' style was industrial-managerial; the locus of shifted from the *ways-means-ends* dialectic to just the *means*. Centralized decision making marginalized the naval voice.
- U.S. strategy: scientific, pragmatic, threat-sensitive, and technologically dependent.
- U.S. beliefs discouraged relating military to economic/political goals.
- Seduced by Jomini, U.S. military focused on realizing high-tech short cuts to quick and decisive victory, particularly via air power.
- The U.S. "is neither a natural sea power nor does a maritime perspective and precepts dominate its strategic culture...The American way of war has been...continentalist." - Colin Gray

*In short, U.S. strategic culture is not conducive to the adoption of a maritime-systemic strategic approach and a maritime strategy.*

## The U.S. Navy's Institutional Thinking:

- U.S. leaders didn't demand the Navy think systemically, so the Navy was able to define its identity, rationality, and strategic outlook.
- “Operations” became the Navy's *raison d'être*. Its knowledge base became profoundly operational-experiential. A narrow worldview.
  - U.S. Navy's epistemology: “that which was learned and inculcated was limited to that which was useful operationally.” Little interest or time in careers to contemplate Navy's purpose beyond that.
  - The kinds of problems liked best are tactical-technological.
- Navy leaders assumed positions devoid of anything but operational and programmatically experience.
  - Consequently, “U.S. naval strategy” was simply the “application of their experiences to problems associated with operating, procuring, and rationalizing a forward-deployed fleet.”
  - Need to explain relevance: U.S. naval strategy is rarely apolitical.
- Was contingent operationally, not instrumental strategically.

*The logic in U.S. naval thinking enabled an excellence in naval warfare, but at the expense of its ability to relate its purpose in broader maritime terms.*

### The Maritime Strategy of the 1980s:

- “Decade-long series of mostly classified strategic statements that constituted a body of thought about the Navy’s purpose.”
- “More a heuristic device than an actual war plan.”
- Locus: operational-level; strategic effects largely assumed.
  - But it was a true maritime strategy (in war) that threatened to turn the conflict into a protracted global war.
- A way of “forging institutional consensus (highly successful), and of shifting the strategic debate at the national level (less so).”
- Aligned the Navy’s myriad of operational, programmatic, administrative, intelligence, and pedagogic activities.
- Successfully marketed the goal of a 600-ship Navy.
- Three phases: 1) Deterrence or the Transition to War; 2) Seizing the Initiative meant seizing control of the seas by destroying Soviet naval forces; and 3) Carrying the Fight to the Enemy was about attacking the Soviet homeland and destroying Soviet SSBNs.

*Maritime Strategy was the climatic experience of the late Cold War Navy; a manifestation of American naval thinking, and hence still resonates.*

“A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Sea Power” (2007)

- Tasked by CNO Mullen. Reason: globalization. Systemic thinker: related U.S. naval power w/democracy & prosperity via free markets.
- 16-page unclass pamphlet that redefined the ends of U.S. sea power:
  - “As our security and prosperity are inextricably linked with others’, U.S. maritime forces will be deployed to protect and sustain the peaceful global system comprised of interdependent networks of trade, finance, info, law, people and governance.”- cs21
  - Unlike previous post-Cold War statements, didn’t frame its *raison d’être* in terms of operational virtues & power projecting doctrine.
- However, the means and the ways remained unchanged:
  - Heavily negotiated; systemic admirals vs. high-end-conflict-against-near peers admirals. In short, the best way to protect the system was to deter great power war.
  - As usual, the safest route to asserting the Navy’s relevance and budget was to justify itself in terms of major combat operations.
  - Congress ignored it; a strategy without a resource plan isn't one.

*Not a strategy per se, more an attempt at a maritime strategic approach.*

“A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Sea Power: Forward, Engaged, and Ready” (2015) (CS21R—for “revised”)

- Tasked by CNO Greenert. Purpose: rectify CS21’s faults by focusing on how USN/USMC/USCG will be designed, organized, & employed.
- However, no elaboration or expansion of maritime-systemic thought.
  - Frames U.S. maritime services’ purpose in terms of their operational virtues and power projecting doctrine (again).
- Ordering of imperatives—Deterrence, Sea Control, Power Projection, Maritime Security, and All Domain Access—signals shift back to a threat-based, major power conflict strategic approach.

“A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority” (2016)

- Tasked by CNO Richardson to set a course to achieve CS21R’s aims.
- Much broader and more systemic-maritime oriented. Supposed to be about the “how,” but expands upon the “why.”
- Emphasizes need to address “great power competition” with China and Russia, but does so the context of the U.S.-led system.

*At a point of strategic inflection, “Design” is a promising sign the Navy is thinking in maritime terms and organizing toward a maritime strategy.*



# CSBA IV. Future of U.S. Maritime Strategy

So, given an understanding of national/institutional factors and U.S. maritime strategies, what would a U.S. maritime strategy look like? Odds are—good or bad—it will probably be:

- **Threat-centric**. Rationalizing its purpose in terms of **threats** and **warfighting** has been the surest way to leverage the necessary congressional and societal support and budgets.
- **About great power war**, (where the strategic leverage—**and relevance**—of naval forces has historically been the greatest).
- **Battle-centric**: focused **conceptually** and **materially**:
  - On **deterring war** and **transitioning to offensive naval warfare**
  - **Less on organizing to wage protracted maritime warfare** (i.e., ensuring/denying access to resources, markets, production lines, allies/partners, threats, and battlefields).
- Focused on **operational-level problems and high-tech solutions especially to ensure access**. Joint, allied, and global in character.
- Attempting to **forge internal consensus, align the Navy's many operational, programmatic, admin, intel, and pedagogic activities**.

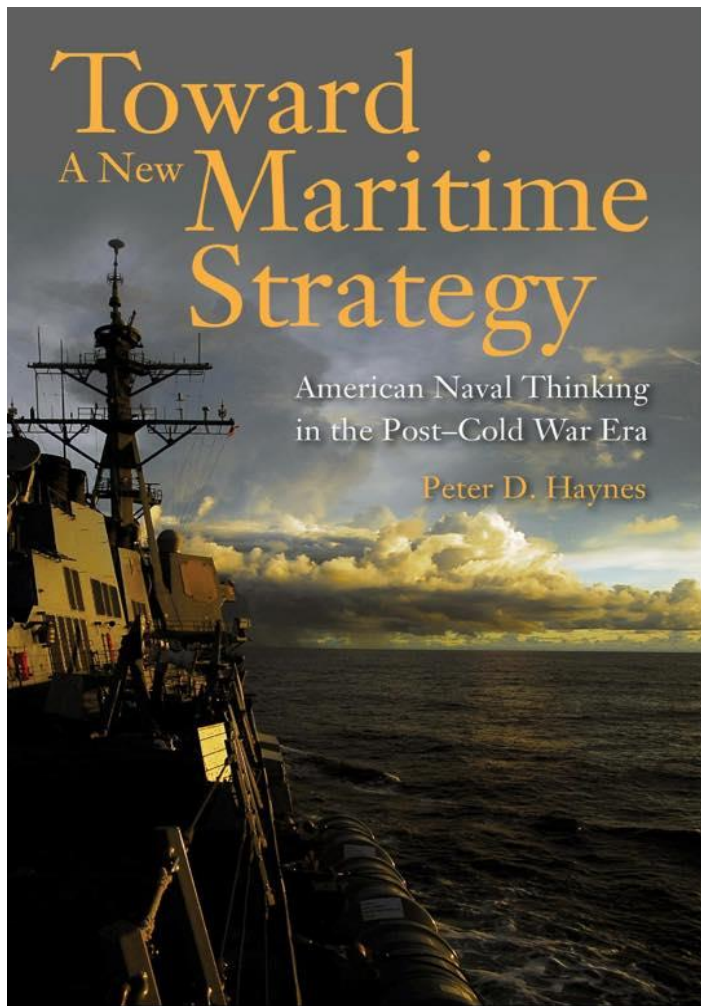
*It will be more about the “how,” less about “why.” It will concern itself with how to operate, procure, and rationalize a forward-deployed fleet.*

# CSBA IV. Future of U.S. Maritime Strategy (cont'd)

## What should the Navy do?

- While it may rationalize it in threat-centric terms, the Navy **needs to conceive** and **operationalize** its maritime strategy **in systemic terms**.
  - The system: source from which U.S. draws its power, influence, and ability to provide for/defend its way of life and the system itself, which has increased prosperity/raised living standards.
- In an interconnected/interdependent world, **economic warfare can be decisive, but highly collateral**—w/allies and neutrals, and could result in **economic MAD, and systemic instability or downfall**.
  - **Need detailed planning/cooperation** w/interagency, allies, partners, and business—can't assume economic effects.
  - Net assess U.S./rival control over these systems, financial and economic (e.g., resource) vulnerabilities, and abilities to adapt.
- **More analysis**: 1) **economic coercion**; 2) **what deters/reassures** (can't assume more ships=more deterrence); 3) **alliance management**; and 4) **promoting collective security**, stability, & trust.

*The Navy needs to understand economic /financial changes, broaden planning beyond military to political-economic, represent the maritime (as opposed to just naval) dimensions of U.S. strategy, and lead conceptually.*



*“Regardless of where globalization may lead, there is only one institution on earth currently capable of conceiving and executing a maritime strategy. The fact that the U.S. Navy cannot do so alone doesn’t relieve it of the requirement to exercise strategic leadership.”*

*- Pete Haynes*

## MSC16

- The strategic importance of the maritime domain is indisputable:
  - Nearly three-quarters of the world is covered by water
  - The majority of the world's population lives within a few hundred kilometres of the oceans
  - 90 percent of the world's commerce travels by sea.
- The sea has long been the basis of prosperity and security, and a stable and secure ocean commons has been the foundation of the dramatic expansion of trade, communications, and prosperity around the world.
- With the global shift towards Asia, which is itself primarily a maritime theatre, the notion of Pacific seapower is increasingly at the heart of discussions amongst lawmakers, naval planners, academics and industry representatives.
- The challenge is to apply seapower in a comprehensive manner that protects national interests at sea, promotes greater collective security, stability, and trust, and does so in a manner that is appropriate to the region.