Small Threats and Sea Service Strategy: Seapower and Its Role in Countering Non-State Threats

Joshua Tallis

Structured Abstract

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Purpose—The latest U.S. tri-service maritime strategy (*Advantage at Sea*) requires the sea services (Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard) to assess the strategic role of seapower in countering violent non-state actors, balanced against a larger agenda of great power competition. This offers a theoretical structure for assessing seapower's strategic effects against non-state actors.

Design, Methodology, Approach—This article pursues its analysis through two phases. First, we trace intellectual histories through U.S. strategic texts, developing a foundation for how, why, and when maritime strategies account for non-state actors. Second, we build on Thomas Schelling's division of how forces are operationalized in order to trace the strategic effects of sea power vis-à-vis the concepts of deterrence, assurance, and compellence.

Findings—In most cases, seapower appears to play a non-strategic role in deterring, assuring, or compelling non-state threats—that is to say, naval power has operational use, but seapower is rarely strategically decisive. The nearest exception is in seapower's role assuring some allies and partners facing imminent threats from non-state groups. Meanwhile, seapower remains, in aggregate, important for preserving the international order, resulting in a paradox: even as the effects from day-to-day competition at sea build to the strategic benefit of sea services (in this case, those of the U.S.), the incremental actions of sea services are often non-strategic in nature and thus risks systemic underinvestment and undervaluing.

Practical Implications—Seapower and naval power are not synonyms, and policymakers and academics should move to thinking about seapower in a more expansive and systemic manner in order to rectify the gap between seapower's moderate effect on non-state actors and its overall strategic value to the international system.

email: Tallisj@cna.org

Originality, Value—Non-state threats will not disappear, despite the shifting U.S. and global focus to competition with great powers. Consequently, it remains critical for sea services to define how threats other than great powers integrate into maritime strategy and the strategic toolkits of seapower.

Keywords: coast guard, maritime security, navy, piracy, terrorism

I. Introduction

The U.S. Defense Department emphasis on competition with China and Russia has redirected the American military services away from small threats in favor of great power competitors. Yet violent non-state threats remain a feature of the global security landscape, particularly for the three U.S. sea services (the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard), which are actively deployed day-to-day. To efficiently address the persistent risks posed by non-state actors, it is valuable for the sea services to assess how small threats relate to their larger strategic responsibilities. This article is therefore written with the U.S. sea services as the central point of analysis, responding to U.S. national and maritime strategies. The implications of this analysis, however, produce results applicable to the study and theory of seapower more broadly. Moreover, U.S. strategy (and the discourse around U.S. intentions) has implications for the strategies and signaling of many U.S. allies and partners, which makes it again important to understand the drivers of maritime security concepts in U.S. maritime strategy.

The prominence of violent non-state groups in the strategic frameworks of the U.S. sea services is not static. From the demise of the Soviet Union until the attack on the USS *Cole*, terrorism and criminality were generally out of sight in Navy and Marine Corps strategic documents, while the Coast Guard was principally focused on narcotics and irregular migration. September 11 changed that, and for more than a decade the U.S. sea services' strategic interest in non-state actors grew steadily, from al-Qaeda to jihadist terrorism to a host of non-ideological actors such as pirates and traffickers. They were joined in this interest by a global coalition of naval and coast guard partners and through international programs such as the container security initiative and the proliferation security initiative. Today, with renewed focus on major state threats, a general reduction in interest in non-state challenges has slowly yielded to focuses on other types of non-state risks, namely illegal fishing. The "Plus One" category remains as nebulous as it is persistent.

For the U.S. sea services, violent non-state threats remain a feature of the security landscape. Although the prominence of such threats in U.S. maritime strategies has declined, a renewed focus on major state threats has not wholly eliminated the request from American policymakers for the sea services to counter non-state actors. The same is true of maritime strategy. The latest U.S. tri-service maritime document (*Advantage at Sea*), like its 2000s predecessors, invokes the role of maritime forces in managing a wide range of small-scale threats, even given a broader reorientation towards major powers. The resulting strategic tension—a framework focused on great powers but inclusive of smaller threats and actors—requires greater attention. Such attention would mean understanding the strategic connections between non-state threats and sea service contributions. And one way to explore that issue is to ask, how do the sea services address the threats that seem to relate least to great

power competition—violent non-state actors? What is the collective value of the U.S. sea services (i.e., seapower) when facing these threats?

If seapower is the tool that the sea services collectively bring to policymakers, how does that capability align with the threats and challenges posed by violent non-state actors? Where is seapower valuable as an instrument against non-state threats, and where might it not be? By focusing on seapower and its relationship to non-state threats, we are pushed into a conversation on the *strategic* applicability of the sea services in countering such actors, not simply their tactical or operational potential.

In a prior monograph,[1] we explored the strategic linkages between the concepts of maritime security (or good order at sea) and great power competition. In it, we looked at how the U.S. sea services can learn from two decades of executing low-end missions by asking how maritime security relates to competition with major powers. We concluded that low-end missions are integral to day-to-day competition with China and Russia if we define the nature of that contest as one over control of the international rules-based order. As a result, we should understand day-to-day competition at sea as preserving core norms, such as the free flow of commerce and freedom of navigation, while countering any adversary efforts to slowly erode those norms.

That interpretation of day-to-day competition's role in managing longitudinal shifts in power based on small adverse actions accreting over time is one that the tri-service strategy embraces, noting that a feature of maritime competition is "[denying] our rivals' use of incremental coercion."[2] At a high strategic level, there is a clear connection between small-scale threats and sea service contributions to U.S. objectives countering high-end competitors. What is left is to understand how non-state actors fit into that formulation.

In the analysis below, we address that gap, drawing out the unique challenge of connecting sea service strategy to non-state threats. We find that even as the result of sea service activities to counter non-state threats may yield strategic benefits for the U.S., the tools that the sea services bring to bear are often not decisive in resolving non-state challenges. This disjoint, discussed more in the conclusion, underscores the core challenge in efficiently addressing non-state threats in an era dominated by a focus on great powers. Although the effects from day-to-day competition at sea aggregate to strategic gains for the U.S., the incremental actions of the U.S. sea services are often non-strategic in nature, and thus risk systemic underinvestment and undervaluing in strategy and by policymakers. Resolving that dilemma will remain a key challenge of operationalizing any tri-service strategy that attempts to incorporate non-traditional threats into a larger framework focused on major powers.

II. On Seapower

Despite the ubiquity of the word, seapower is difficult to define.[3] At its broadest, seapower is taken to be the result of a virtuous cycle between "maritime commerce" and "naval supremacy," which in the intellectual tradition of Mahan makes for the bedrock of national power.[4] Unlike land power or air power, seapower is uniquely expansive in its bundling of economic and military influences. As naval historian Geoffrey Till summarizes: "Seapower can be seen as a tight and inseparable system in which naval power protects the maritime assets that are the ultimate source of its prosperity and military effectiveness."[5]

When used by maritime analysts, seapower is often intended in a narrower way: as a stand-in for naval power. Yet as one naval scholar notes, "sea power and combat capability are not the same thing."[6] Moreover, naval power is itself a flexible idea. The latest U.S. maritime strategy, the December 2020 tri-service document *Advantage at Sea*, defines naval power broadly as "the influence of naval forces across all domains," and invokes the relatedly broad idea of "integrated all-domain naval power" as its central feature. The latter phrase is defined as "synchronizing the complementary capabilities, capacities, roles, investments, and authorities of the Naval Service," which "multiplies the traditional influence of sea power to produce a more competitive and lethal total force."[7]

In order to approach the question of non-state threats and their relationship to seapower, it is useful to distill the discussion of strategy and seapower down to two more manageable questions:

- What does it mean for a naval activity to be strategic?
- What does naval power accomplish?

With respect to strategic effects, Nicholas Lambert offers a useful framework for how to measure if an action certifies as strategic. Such an act must (1) "aim directly at achieving an overarching *political goal*," and it must (2) "include a path to end hostilities on acceptable terms: There must be an 'off-switch."[8] When we say an act or campaign is strategic, it therefore speaks to these larger ideals, which themselves are a function of a deeper description of seapower as more than purely a military activity.

With respect to what navies do, we can borrow from Thomas Schelling's broader distillation of how military force is operationalized. These functions can be broadly summarized as: (1) dissuading actors from undertaking unwanted behavior, (2) providing allies and partners with the confidence that a given country remains a reliable partner, and (3) using force when necessary to pressure actors to comply with the preferences of a given country. In other words, the sea services' strategic activities, and thus the constituent functions of seapower, fall into the buckets of deterrence, assurance, and compellence.

Deterrence is a familiar concept in strategic studies. It speaks to the threat of violence as a tool to dissuade an adversary from a course of action that is undesired by the other party. The means by which such a threat is most successfully delivered is a matter of intense debate, but the underlying goal remains to avoid the use of force.

And if deterrence is about the threat of violence to dissuade an action, compellence is about the *use* of violence to force a concession from an adversary. Thomas Schelling offers the term as a means to differentiate deterrence from more coercive courses of action (the latter of which require a competitor to give something up), and the distinction can alternatively be seen through contrasting dissuasion and persuasion.[9]

Finally, while deterrence and compellence focus on the threat and use of violence against adversaries, assurance helps us capture the role of military forces as tools for messaging to allies and partners. This is not to be confused with the necessary reassuring quality embedded in deterrence—the implicit promise that if an adversary declines to pursue an escalatory action, the counterparty will continue to avoid the use of force. Assurance is about signaling to allies and partners the credibility of a country's commitment to their mutual strategic obligations, whatever those may be.

The breakdown of seapower into deterrence, assurance, and compellence is not the only

way to divide seapower into functions—something to which we will return in the conclusion. In U.S. strategies from the Cold War through today, the sea services have organized their value propositions to the nation according to spectrums of conflict, specific capabilities, conceptual strategic imperatives, regions of operation, and more.[10] Yet at a strategic level, our breakdown captures well the breadth of rationales for what military force does, and by extension why the sea services do what they do—and for us here, how that relates to non-state actors.

To explore the strategic relationship between the sea services and non-state actors, we will begin with an assessment of how U.S. maritime strategy has incorporated non-state maritime threats over the last 30 years. This outline sets the stage for a more detailed focus to follow on how non-state actors, and the tools the sea services bring to bear, fit under the umbrellas of deterrence, assurance, and compellence. We conclude with lessons for the future development of maritime strategies and how they can continue to incorporate non-state threats into frameworks aimed more at major powers.

III. Non-State Actors and Sea Service Strategy

Non-state actors remain relevant to U.S. (and others') national interests. Operationally, these threats pose real risks to U.S. maritime forces operating at sea. Strategically, non-state actors of suitable scale can undermine key tenets of the rules-based order, such as the state monopoly on violence or the free flow of maritime commerce. Yet the way the sea services—and the Navy in particular—describe the relationship between non-state actors and maritime strategy is not static. Understanding the shifts in how the U.S. sea services think about non-state actors is valuable context for describing the latitude that the services have in how they choose to link non-state threats to their strategic concepts. It also helps set into context, for non–U.S. allies and partners, important intellectual undercurrent shaping U.S. signaling and messaging.

3.1 The Persistence of Non-State Threats

The era of the Global War on Terror seems to be coming to a very slow end for the United States. Yet the asymmetric use of large U.S. naval assets against non-state threats—and the targeting of large U.S. platforms by non-state actors—remains a feature of operating at sea.

In the early morning hours of October 13, 2016, the destroyer USS *Nitze* launched several Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles (TLAMs) into points on Yemen's western coast, just north of the Bab el-Mandeb at the southern mouth of the Red Sea. The strike was the penultimate move in a two-week clash pitting the U.S. Navy against a Yemeni insurgent group, the Houthis. Twelve days prior, on October 1, forces affiliated with the Houthis had launched anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) at an Emirati transport ship. The vessel sustained serious damage, and the attack marked the first incident since Hezbollah's targeting of the INS *Hanit* a decade earlier in which a non-state group used an ASCM against maritime targets.

In response, the U.S. Navy dispatched three vessels to secure the straits for U.S. and commercial traffic after the initial attack: USS *Mason* (DDG 87), USS *Nitze* (DDG 94), and USS *Ponce* (AFSB 15). These ships, most notably the *Mason*, soon came under fire themselves.

On October 9, *Mason* fought off what appeared to be two ASCMs (a third, which fell short, was launched about an hour later), likely making history as the first U.S. warship to fire an Evolved SeaSparrow Missile (ESSM) and Standard Missile-2 (SM-2) in a real world ASCM defense scenario.[11] The *Mason* faced and defeated fire again on October 12, prompting the TLAM strike early on October 13 against three radar sites believed to be associated with the attacks. The limited strike was aimed at dissuading the Houthis without plunging the U.S. into the ongoing conflict, which the U.S. indirectly supported through Saudi Arabia until 2021. Yet the engagement only concluded after both *Mason* and *Nitze* came under fire from five more missiles on October 15.[12]

In a world where U.S. strategy is rebalancing to a focus on major competitors, it is notable that the most sustained real-world assault on American warships since the 1980s Tanker War arose from a non-state group operating at a critical global maritime chokepoint.

Threats from non-state actors to sea services do not just manifest at the tactical level—they are operationally and strategically relevant as well. Proxy warfare, for example, is a staple of competition among large powers.[13] Consequently, non-state actors may find support from states seeking to undermine other major powers' positions in key regions, which may include providing material support to groups with maritime aspirations.

Strategically, the U.S. sea services emphasize maintaining the international rules-based order as a key maritime contribution to strategic competition. As stressed in the introduction to *Advantage at Sea*: "Our security and prosperity depend on the seas. Since the end of World War II, the United States has built, led, and advanced a rules based international system through shared commitments with our allies and partners…. That system is now at risk."[14] One component of maintaining that system is ensuring that the entities which live outside of it, violent non-state actors, do not undermine the economic and security benefits that come from those countries that participate within its rules. Despite *Advantage at Sea*'s emphasis on China and Russia, the document makes this connection explicitly: "Other rivals, including … violent extremist organizations, and transnational criminal organizations, also continue to subvert the international rules-based order."[15] The task of maintaining the order may include minimizing the disruptive activities of terrorists, pirates, and other rogue actors with the capacity to threaten commerce or sovereignty on a large scale.[16] Consequently, it is useful to understand how maritime strategies have addressed such issues in the past.

3.2 The Perennial "Plus One"

Over the last three decades, U.S. maritime documents have related to the risks and strategic position of non-state threats in different ways. Across strategies since 9/11, it has become common to include some "other" adversary category, to account for the persistence of non-state challenges even as focuses shift with administrations. For some time, the most common way to differentiate among types of threats was through the "4+1" framing, reflecting the challenges posed to the U.S. by China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea (the "4"), and

the transnational challenges that are present globally (the "+1"). Though the phraseology has come out of fashion, the idea of the "Plus One" remains useful because it captures the inherent flexibility in how American policymakers think about non-state challenges.

The size and importance of the Plus One has proven dynamic. As the actors posing the least (truly, no) existential threat to the United States, and the most fungible of the 4+1's competitors, the erstwhile Plus One category has over time expanded and contracted according to events and expediency. We can trace three broad eras in maritime strategy that characterize this ebb and flow starting at the fall of the Soviet Union.

3.3 Peace Dividend, 1991–2001

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the sudden shift in geopolitical winds from a competitive bipolar world to one with a single hegemon precipitated a rethinking of how the United States should exercise power, where it should do so, towards what ends, and with what resources. A combination of surplus materiel,[17] new strategic concepts, and limited geopolitical risk all became driving factors in a growing U.S. Navy involvement in low-end operations and "operations other than war."

"…From The Sea" (1992) was the first major post–Cold War maritime (Navy and Marine Corps) strategy and captures well the changing focus of maritime services unburdened by peer competition. In strategic terms, the document marked a U.S. shift from sea control to power projection. In operational terms, the strategy marked a departure from securing sea lines of communication (SLOCs) in the north Atlantic to assuring joint expeditionary operations and global forward engagement.[18] The strategy was also as much a response to budgetary realities as to changes in the operational environment. Facing a peace dividend and Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman General Colin Powell's force reduction concept, the Navy's best effort to stave off steep budget cuts would come from an ability to remain relevant in the new world order. A 1994 follow-on strategy, "Forward … From the Sea," largely expanded on those themes. The document maintains an emphasis on joint forcible entry in the littorals while including a more forceful rhetorical premium on the role of maritime forces not just winning wars but preventing conflicts in the first place.

Among the most significant legacies of this era was the reemergence of the littorals in the Navy's strategic consciousness. A historically blue water Navy faced, in the early 1990s, the responsibility to operate near green coastal waters. Yet even as the Navy was drawn towards a greater focus on projecting power and influence ashore, the nature of the U.S. adversary remained predominantly conventional. States remained the dominant threat against which the Navy and Marine Corps would operate. Naval strike support in Desert Storm and the NATO bombing campaign in Yugoslavia are emblematic. Discussions of maritime security missions were, therefore, largely absent from these strategies. While "…From the Sea" mentions, for the first time in a major U.S. maritime strategy, maritime interdiction operations, neither the 1992 nor 1994 white paper outright addresses terrorism, piracy, or constabulary missions such as counterdrug operations.[19]

None of that is to say that non-state actors were entirely ignored in the post–Cold War drawdown. One Navy document, *Navy Doctrine Publication-1* (NDP-1, 1994), did broach some of these topics. There is a full section in that document devoted to operations other than war, in which NDP-1 notes the potential role of naval forces in a range of low end

contingencies, including (inter alia) counterterrorism, migration interdiction, humanitarian assistance, counterdrug operations, and public health operations.[20] And at an operational level, we can see some sea-based activity against non-state actors via Operation Infinite Reach, the 1998 ship-launched cruise missile strike against al-Qaeda targets in Afghanistan and Sudan. Yet, at a strategic level, NDP-1 had modest influence within the Navy, and thus precipitated no serious reorientation to such missions.[21] The Coast Guard, with its law enforcement remit, was of course oriented to address narcotics trafficking and migrant interdiction in this period, and the "war on drugs" discourse had elevated their significance. Yet, with the possible exception of drug traffickers, these non-state missions were not consistently seen as of strategic national security significance. All that would change with the attacks of September 11, 2001.

3.4 9/11, 2001–2014

In 2000, with the al-Qaeda attack on the destroyer USS *Cole* (DDG-67), the Navy faced a tragic preview of the destructive ambition of a motivated terrorist organization. For most Americans, however, the jihadist brand of internationalized terrorism came to public consciousness one year later with the attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., and the crash of Flight 93 in southwest Pennsylvania, on September 11.

It is an understatement to say that 9/11 fundamentally shifted U.S. military and foreign policy, with global implications. For nearly two decades thereafter, defense strategy was occupied by two land wars fought predominantly against non-state forces. Stability operations became core missions across parts of Africa, the Middle East, Southwest Asia, and Southeast Asia. This era and these missions emboldened an arm of naval strategy called post-modernism, a movement that takes as its central principle the role of navies as collective defenders of the global system's common goods. Post-modern naval theory is characterized by using sea control and expeditionary capabilities to support humanitarian assistance, good order at sea, and cooperative maritime diplomacy.[22]

Maritime security is elemental to this strategic vision of what sea services do. Maritime security operations are key components of good order at sea, stability operations, and humanitarian assistance, which captured well the types of missions a counterterrorism focus would require. Admiral Michael Mullen's concept of the Thousand Ship Navy was representative of this post-modern thinking and just how high it reached in naval circles. The concept held that navies would not just secure the seas to leverage them for national self-interest. Rather, they would work collectively to defend an international system against predation at all levels. Under this framing, the very concept of seapower shifts "from a focus on dominance to a focus on supervision."[23]

The strategic pinnacle of this movement was the tri-service *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* (CS21, 2007). The strategy is not a pure representation of post-modernism, but rather illustrates a clash of ideas inside the U.S. sea services less than a decade after 9/11. The document is an amalgamation of the two dominant competing naval strategic camps—the ascendant post-modernists and the more familiar blue water (Mahanian) traditionalists. As one naval analyst explored, CS21 navigates these camps by incorporating two themes: (1) collective defense of the maritime system (post-modernism), and (2) maintenance of forward deployed credible combat power (traditionalism).[24] These themes can be seen in the

strategy's discussions of "globally distributed, mission-tailored forces" and "regionally con-centrated, credible combat power," respectively.[25] This inclusion of post-modern naval concepts of good order at sea into a tri-service capstone document elevated non-state actors to new strategic heights for the sea services. The strategy speaks explicitly of terrorism, piracy, and drug trafficking. The maritime forces would, henceforth, be responsible for countering a very wide range of non-state threats at sea, which themselves were at the heart of what it meant for sea services to operate in defense of the common maritime good. And these requirements were further bolstered by developments of new programs reliant in part on maritime forces. The proliferation security initiative, launched in 2003, was sparked by (and consistent with) the Bush administration's emphasis on interdiction.[26] Likewise, the container security initiative, led by Customs and Border Protection, aimed a heightened degree of focus on the role of the maritime space in transporting hazardous materials related to non-state threats.

3.5 Great Power Resurgence, 2014–Present

In 2015, the maritime services published a revised (truly, a replacement) Cooperative Strategy document (*A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower: Forward, Engaged, Ready*, CS21R). While the document spent more rhetorical space detailing maritime security issues than the original,[27] the tide had already begun to turn in the sea services' practical interest in pursuing non-state actors.

The clearest moment marking the start of this era may be the illegal Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. That campaign effectively reset NATO's relationship with Russia, producing a reengaged Navy and Marine Corps interest in the European theater and contributed to the eventual reinstatement of the U.S. Second Fleet in the Atlantic. Concurrently, China's rise had become increasingly salient by that time, and Russian intervention in Syria had metastasized into a stronger position in the Eastern Mediterranean. The revised Cooperative Strategy speaks more to this newly competitive geostrategic environment than it does to an interest in non-state threats.

This sentiment was crystalized in the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS). The NDS unclassified summary is explicit in its conclusion that state competition has regained supremacy as the central defense planning factor. The summary notes, "Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security."[28] Terrorism remains a threat in need of attention, but the NDS summary only mentions one group specifically (ISIS) and sidelines countering other forms of illicit non-state activity predominantly to operations in Africa.[29]

Today, after the initial pivot to "great power competition," there is a discernable effort to refine an understanding of the role of non-state and small-scale threats in a U.S. maritime strategy focused on strategic competitors. The 2020 tri-service strategy is representative of this movement. The document remains clear that competition with great powers is the sea services' central focus: "*Advantage at Sea* is a Tri-Service Maritime Strategy that focuses on China and Russia, the two most significant threats to this era of global peace and prosperity."[30] Yet the inclusion of the Coast Guard into any maritime strategy precipitates references to both rule of law, generally, and non-state actors, specifically. Partially for this reason, *Advantage at Sea* includes a section that specifically argues the importance of preserving the

international rules-based order, and good order at sea, as part of a larger strategy of competition. As with the 2007 Cooperative Strategy, the incorporation of the Coast Guard into a maritime strategy (even one focused on major powers) again augurs questions regarding the role of seapower in addressing non-state threats.

At the same time as the Coast Guard's inclusion in *Advantage at Sea* pushes U.S. maritime strategy back towards a need to incorporate non-state issues, concerns over China's expansive approach to maritime competition is further bending the paradigm on the relevance of non-state threats in maritime strategy. The result is a growing U.S. emphasis on a slightly different set of non-state issues, namely illegal fishing (not to mention state-adjacent irregular threats such as distant-water fishing fleets). This focus is evinced in the Coast Guard's release of a 2020 counter illegal fishing strategy,[31] and several fishing-related studies mandated as recently as the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act.

IV. Seapower's Value Proposition

With an understanding of how the Plus One has changed over time, we are now well-positioned to explore the detailed questions of this paper—what role does seapower play in deterring non-state adversaries? What audiences are of significance for U.S. assurance activities, and how do the U.S. sea services support that agenda? Can maritime forces compel terrorists, and if so, compel them to do what? This section delves into the intersection of seapower, violent non-state groups, and the topics of deterrence, assurance, and compellence. And again, though the focus here is on U.S. sea services and their strategies, the theoretical architecture from this analysis is broadly applicable to other naval forces and theorizing on seapower generally.

4.1 Deterrence

With its roots in analyzing the prospects of nuclear conflict, the study of deterrence has since evolved in numerous directions, including strands on conventional deterrence and deterrence in cyberspace. Among the expanded research applications for deterrence theories is a body of analysis that gained particular salience after 9/11 on the idea of deterring non-state actors, specifically terrorists.[32] Could they be deterred? And if so, for our purposes, what role would seapower play in effecting that deterrence? Do the answers to those questions apply to other forms of non-state threats?

4.1.1 Deterring Terrorism. A survey of literature on non-state deterrence suggests: "The area of greatest and most important consensus is that deterrence remains viable and relevant, even in dealing with terrorism."[33] Underneath that broad conclusion, however, lies open questions about how to adapt the deterrence construct for non-state applications. In contrast to deterring a nuclear adversary,[34] terrorists pose no existential threat to the US's national survival, and thus deterrence against such actors is more unidirectional than mutual.[35] This asymmetry proves problematic when pursuing deterrence against non-state threats. As one academic poses, how do you deter "organizations that 'lack a return address' against which to retaliate?"[36]

Probably the largest obstacle to applying deterrence concepts to non-state actors is the disparity between objectives among states and terrorists. A state could deter another state from aggression while not challenging the fundamental existence of that state—indeed, this is the norm. It is more politically challenging for states to deter terrorists from attacking them while permitting the groups to remain intact. As one study summarizes, "deterrence and eradication do not fit together easily"[37] This is problematic when considering our requirements for what qualifies as a strategic action, given that such an act would need to be linked to a political objective and a plausible path towards the end of hostilities.

One way in which this tension can be resolved is through a narrower strategy of dissuading smaller terrorist or militant movements from joining with larger brands like al-Qaeda or ISIS. In such case, the U.S. might signal that it will not target smaller local groups provided they neither receive nor deliver material support to organizations of U.S. national interest.[38] As we can already see, the implications of deterring terrorist groups imply some measure of tolerance for their persistence in some form or some regions, which is politically problematic (even if realistic).

Proposed means of deterring terrorist organizations wrestle with these issues in different ways. Indirect deterrence focuses on raising the risks to those who might aid in terrorism rather than the actual terrorists themselves.[39] By shrinking the pool of support delivered to terrorists, the scale or volume of successful attacks should diminish. This approach is similar to deterrence by punishment, but with the punishment aimed at third parties; "a particular leader may not be easily deterrable, but other elements of the system" that supports terrorism may be.[40] One expert, writing of al-Qaeda, notes that characterizing the group "as a system opens the door to deterrence by punishment," since those "who are not themselves eager to sacrifice their own lives for the cause can be threatened with retaliation for their role in facilitating terrorist operations."[41] Indirect deterrence could even be extended to the states that sponsor terrorism, a slightly more conventional deterrence equation but one complicated by attribution challenges (proving a state sponsored a group or attack).

When considering deterrence by punishment against those supporting terrorist organizations, sea-based air and missile strikes are a clear and common tool. Critically, deterrence by punishment need not require the use of seapower, or any military force for that matter—prison can be deterrent enough in some cases. But where kinetic tools are sought, seapower provides one of many platforms for delivering precision strikes against malicious actors.

Yet not all forms of deterrence are amenable to the threatened use of seapower, and some of the concepts that appear ascendant now are much less oriented around the potential use force compared to the military coercive campaigns of the last two decades. Deterrence by denial, for example, might attempt to persuade terrorists that they have no hope of achieving their attack or objective, or that the net benefit of a planned attack will be less than the costs incurred.[42] This approach is largely one of homeland security, counter radicalization, intelligence sharing, and target hardening. Demonstrating community and political resilience is another element, signaling that even successful attacks will not provoke the responses that terrorists hope for.[43] A report by the National War College noted of this deterrent perspective, the "bottom line is that terrorists must believe that ultimately their efforts would be futile."[44] It is difficult to discern a clear role for seapower in this approach,[45] other than in contributing to a massive retaliatory attack.

If we look to 9/11 as a case study in the failure to deter a non-state adversary from

staging an attack, what can we learn about deterring non-state threats? To answer that question, it is useful to distill deterrence down to its two fundamental components: the capability to act, and the credibility to threaten that act.[46] Given that al-Qaeda's leaders likely knew that the U.S. had the military capability to degrade, even destroy the organization, the deterrence failure seems to lie principally in the question of credibility—the US's willingness to use force (as perceived by terrorists). An attitude common among those who choose terrorism as a tactic is that the more powerful adversary lacks the wherewithal to follow through on a sustained campaign of violence. Such was the case with Osama bin Laden's theory of the U.S., believing that the country lacked the stomach for a protracted struggle. Extrapolating from U.S. withdrawals from Vietnam, Lebanon, and Somalia, as well as bin Laden's personal experience with the Soviet exit from Afghanistan, he believed that superpowers would not pursue al-Qaeda indefinitely—even in light of the 1998 Infinite Reach cruise missile strikes. This was reflected in a 1998 interview in which bin Laden explains: "We have seen in the last decade the decline of the American Government and the weakness of the American soldier who is ready to wage cold wars and unprepared to fight long wars. This was proven in Beirut when the Marines fled after two explosions. It also proves they can run in less than 24 hours, and this was also repeated in Somalia."[47]

Seapower's naval function is largely a matter of capability. And when matching U.S. capabilities to that of non-state actors, there can be no question of the US's material overmatch. As we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, matching operational concepts to make best use of those capabilities in a protracted campaign is complicated, but feasible. Where non-state actors—terrorists, in particular—perceive the greatest gap is in credibility. And here, seapower cannot substitute for political signaling and strategic communication. Seapower is only one part of national power, but the entirety of that national power failed to stop the attacks of September 11 in part because the adversary did not believe in the political credibility of American use of force. Whether the sustained U.S. reaction thereafter, which did include seapower through carrier-launched airstrikes and cruise missile strikes, proved otherwise to future terrorist threats is asking to prove a negative, but is at least possible.

4.1.2 Deterring Crime. As groups move into the category of criminal actor, the application of deterrence becomes simpler (in theory, if not in practice). Reducing profit margins for a given illicit commodity or raising the risk of handling that commodity would, at a certain point, dissuade any rational business actor from dealing in such a commodity at scale.

One potential example of successful deterrence against maritime crime, and one involving the use of seapower, is counterpiracy off of the Horn of Africa. A sustained multinational multi-sector (naval and commercial) campaign conspired over several years to make Somali piracy unduly expensive and risky. In some cases, it also included moderate or tacit cooperation with erstwhile competitors, such as the Russian navy. As with most real-world cases of deterrence, it is difficult to draw a straight line from specific efforts to the lack of criminal activity today, but it is likely that some combination of these factors played critical roles in the stark declines in Somali piracy.

In 2011, Somali piracy peaked at 237 reported incidents according to International Maritime Bureau statistics. In response, the international community collaborated to raise the costs and risks of conducting piracy. First, best management practices were implemented

across the shipping industry. These included: training merchant crews to stand piracy watches, disseminating ship handling guidance for evasive maneuvering, publicizing appropriate piracy reporting channels, installing passive (e.g., barbed wire) and active (e.g., fire hoses) barriers to boarding, and building citadels (safe rooms) onboard to wait out pirates who may have successfully boarded. Collectively, these practices raised the cost of piracy by reducing the success rate of attacks and forcing pirates to invest more in fuel, food, and time at sea. Higher failure rates therefore resulted in higher operating costs. Eventually, the deployment of armed guards also increased the risk of failure—pirates aim for easy prey and could be dissuaded by a quick, credible display of force. No vessel with an armed escort was ever successfully boarded.

Concurrent with mariners' efforts to reduce the rewards of piracy, world navies aimed to raise the risks. Maritime patrols coordinated by NATO, the EU, the U.S., and other independent actors brought sustained presence to the Horn of Africa. These patrols were initially insufficient to raise the risk and deter would-be pirates. The absence of a legal regime across the region for addressing piracy was a major obstacle that complicated the prosecution of pirates once they were captured. This resulted in what became known as a "catch and release" policy, whereby detained pirates were simply sent back to Somalia. The risk was evidently not so great. The adoption of new legal regimes in the region for prosecuting pirates, notably in Kenya, changed that dynamic and considerably raised the risk of participating in piracy. Eventually, the international naval presence, mixed with new legal frameworks, meant that capture by a U.S. or European-flagged warship could now credibly result in long term imprisonment. Rumors abounded that capture by other nations could result in an even less palatable outcome.[48]

Some elements of the piracy example obtain in other cases, including expanding legal authorities to make at sea interdictions more of a meaningful threat. The proliferation security initiative, for example, partially aimed to resolve a legal gap made evident in 2002, when a Spanish warship interdicting a suspected weapons smuggling vessel off the coast of Yemen failed to secure the legal authority to seize missile components found onboard. And as with the terrorism example, there are likely spaces where non-state activities merge with state activities. North Korea, for example, engages in maritime (and terrestrial) criminal activity to evade sanctions and smuggle goods and cash into the country, though such instances are out of scope for this analysis.

Although some initial activities of the Somali counterpiracy initiative can be described as acts of compellence, the long-term result (which more often relied on the threat of force rather than its actual employment) appears to be a case of deterrence success. Whereas attacks (actual and attempted) were at 237 in 2011, 2015 was a standout year with 0 attacks. Piracy numbers can wax and wane with latitude, so there is no telling where an individual year's tally will go, but the overall trend has certainly plummeted compared to the late 2000s. Given the range of activities and actors involved in counter piracy, from NATO and EU patrols to mariner self-defense and target hardening initiatives, it is hard to decipher what elements were most critical in precipitating the ultimate decline in attacks. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to conclude that naval power, U.S. and otherwise, played a role in deterring pirates. Indeed, that the counter-piracy initiative was cross sectoral is a more robust example of a truly seapower based approach to a maritime challenge, spanning as it did the integration of naval power and commercial actors.

4.1.3 Summary. We can see, in the cases of terrorism and maritime crimes, that seapower can play a role, though not as large as one might originally expect. In particular, when looking at the issue of terrorism, credibility and, by extension, political solutions to the challenge are much more substantive levers than sea-based kinetic capabilities. Yes, the sea services have a demonstrated capacity to conduct counterterror operations from the sea. Whether the threat of those actions deter terrorists, and whether that approach to counterterrorism is particularly efficacious, is much less clear. And if we take strategic effects to mean advancing political goals and achieving a path towards the end of hostilities, the zero-sum nature of many U.S. overseas counterterror campaigns makes it challenging for seapower to contribute strategically.

Meanwhile, other non-state actors may be more susceptible to targeted campaigns of deterrence, in part because the ability to threaten economic and operational costs is simpler to assess. Piracy, narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, and other illicit businesses ultimately respond to risk incentives. The challenge here becomes more a matter of when these issues are seen as *political*. As explored in the prior section, they may be, as in 2007 when the sea services collectively described instability as a core strategic concern. Today, with the scope of the Plus One changing (and smaller than in 2007), the fact that seapower can achieve operational deterrent effects against criminal actors abuts the reality that these effects are increasingly seen as non-strategic (i.e., non-political).

4.2 Assurance

Deterrence addresses the threat of violence as a tool of dissuasion, aimed against competitors. Assurance takes the opposite framing, focusing on the benefits to allies and partners of that latent military capacity. And when focusing, not on threats but on friends, we can understand countering terrorism and maritime insecurity as comprising a broad coalition of actors. Those actors are divisible into two categories:

- Extra-regional supporters, who have an interest in suppressing non-state actors but are not inhabitants of the primary affected region, and
- Those local stakeholders who most immediately face the risks and challenges of terrorism or maritime crimes.

Extra-regional supporters include a wide swath of U.S. allies and partners working in concert with the U.S. in competition against non-state actors. In Afghanistan, for example, the NATO-led operation included that alliance's more than two-dozen nations, along with contributions from countries from Australia to Georgia.[49] More broadly, dozens of nations provided some measure of support for Operation Enduring Freedom, the US's global war on terror, including everything from combat operations to logistics support to overflight permissions. Counterterrorism has even brought some occasional unexpected partnerships of convenience—Iran, for example, was a notable opponent of ISIS and an uneasy partner in the effort to defeat that group in Iraq.

International partnerships are critical for the information sharing and burden sharing made necessary by the transnational and protracted nature of counterterror, counter-piracy, and counter-narcotics operations. Still, terrorism (like any transnational crime) is local in occurrence. As a consequence, local stakeholders play an irreplaceable role as partners

in countering non-state threats. Countries close to hotspot regions—whether the Philippines, Nigeria, Colombia, or Iraq—are the only ones that can deliver sustained attention to the endemic social, political, and economic challenges that shape the local security environment.

The nature of assuring allies and partners can be said to break down according to the two audiences of extra-regional supporters and local stakeholders. For extra-regional supporters, as the general emphasis on non-state actors diminishes, there is likely less immediate need to provide assurance that the U.S. is committed to countering non-state threats far from shore—if they were ever desired in the first place. The remaining threats are largely remote, geographically, or an issue for intelligence and law enforcement. An American aircraft carrier off the coast of France does not serve to assure the French government of the US's commitment to supporting counterterror or counterpiracy in the Sahel.

For local stakeholders, however, the presence of the U.S. sea services can provide some relevant assurances, especially given the existential risks some of these nations face from terrorism, insurgency, or organized crime. Presence illustrates a tangible commitment on the part of the U.S. to stand by nations threatened by instability, as in supporting foreign internal defense or counterinsurgency operations. One example of this assurance was the presence of U.S. Navy assets in support of Joint Special Operations Task Force—Philippines. The Navy, supporting U.S. special operators and the Philippine military, provided sustained presence in assistance to counterinsurgency operations in the Mindanao region.

Of course, the extent to which local stakeholders are in search of assurance regarding U.S. commitments to regional stability is not quite as clear as, for example, interest in U.S. assurances vis-à-vis state threats such as Russia, China, Iran, or North Korea. In Southeast Asia, for example, nations such as Malaysia and Indonesia have historically been opposed to U.S. presence near territorial waters, which may stem from concerns over maintaining sovereignty across large archipelagic territories. Moreover, local stakeholders do not always share the US's focus on terrorism. Some are more concerned about IUU fishing and human trafficking (such as Indonesia and Malaysia) or piracy (such as Singapore). Nor is it always the case that the expenditure of seapower resources on those assurance missions are the most efficient use of scarce assets. Yet seapower does have an advantage over other forms of military support, given that over the horizon presence can assure allies (and meet U.S. defense needs) while providing for the ability to meet other national obligations on short notice.

U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard–led training and exercise programs are also potential tools in signaling an assured U.S. interest in regional stability. U.S. programs such as Africa Partnership Station, Africa Maritime Law Enforcement Program, Southern Partnership Station, Continuing Promise, Maritime Law Enforcement Initiative, Oceania Maritime Security Initiative, and Caribbean Basin Security Initiative are all examples of programs that rely on or utilize seapower to build international capabilities to combat transnational crime or terrorism. For many partner nations, such as those in the Caribbean or the Gulf of Guinea, these programs are a primary linkage with the U.S. military, though the dedication of U.S. assets afloat for such activities is often outcompeted by higher profile demands in other parts of the world.

Where maritime assets are deployed, one of the underlying justifications may involve a more expansive concept of assurance. Training for maritime security missions promote

interoperability, capacity building, and U.S. access, all of which are U.S. goals in countering Chinese and Russian influence and may assure partners that the U.S. remains attuned to their interests. Examples of programs that meet this dual use threshold might include Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) and Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) with Asian partners, and Obangame Express, Cutlass Express, and Phoenix Express with African ones.

Finally, it is worth considering that the different sea services may also contribute to different assurance signals. For example, though scarce, use of Coast Guard assets may signal that the U.S. sees a given region or threat as at least partially constabulary (rule of law) related, which would invite a different kind of U.S. action. Relatedly, the visibility of assets to a host population can be an important component of how assuring a signal is. For many partners, the sea services' capacity to provide support without an onshore footprint is a critical political asset, and one that uniquely differentiates the sea services from their terrestrial counterparts. Allies likely perceive different assurances based on the scale of U.S. commitments, the sea service assets employed, and the service engaging in the gesture.

4.2.1 Summary. With deterrence, the question was whether non-state actors were subject to being deterred. With assurance, the issue pivots back to state actors. And though more geographically removed partners may find some assurance in U.S. maritime forces conducting maritime security or counterterrorism missions abroad, the change in the security environment over the last half decade means that the issues for which many European or Asian allies seek assurance are infrequently those of non-state actors. Yet for U.S. allies and partners in other regions, local presence, particularly presence that is over the horizon, can be a core reminder that the U.S. remains engaged with local needs. Seapower is uniquely suited to provide that assurance, balanced as it is towards providing over the horizon support. Moreover, that support is indeed explicitly political in nature, and so meets an important condition for qualifying as "strategic." And as the battle for influence among great powers migrates around the world, such assurances may play an important role in U.S. regional strategies of competition with Russia and China in places such as West Africa or Latin America.

4.3 Compellence

As with deterrence, compelling terrorists or criminals (through the use of force rather than the mere threat thereof) implies there is some level or nature of activity that the United States would find permissible from non-state organizations. Compellence and eradication are not synonyms, and the use of force to persuade an actor to abandon a given course of action would suggest that some alternative course of action is acceptable. That is a difficult line to hold, particularly politically, and particularly with respect to terrorist organizations. In practical terms, however, the concept is not as foreign as it at first seems.

4.3.1 Compelling Terrorists. Terrorist campaigns are political in nature, and thus they are often best resolved by political (not entirely military) solutions. Here, the link to naval power is evident at a tactical and operational level, but far more ambiguous on that strategic and political plane.

Notably, some groups are susceptible to functional eradication through the application of hard power and the passage of time. Many terror organizations do not find sustained support even among a minority of a community, while others (like the Basque ETA or the Weather Underground in the U.S.) simply lose salience and die out. In these cases, seapower can play a role in delivering strikes, though eradication strategies strain the limits of compellence, unless compellence were interpreted at the individual level, not the group level (i.e., individuals were persuaded to abandon the cause).

Compelling a terrorist group, as a collective organization, to abandon violence and pursue political change through less lethal means is often the ideal end to more durable campaigns of terroristic violence. The end of hostilities in Northern Ireland offers one example. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement represented a military victory of the British state against the Provisional Irish Republican Army. However, the military victory did not mark the absolute destruction of the IRA, whose political arm (Sinn Fein) remains a dominant force in Northern Irish politics. An organized campaign of counterterror by the state, alongside a willingness to pursue a political settlement, successfully compelled a terrorist organization to abandon violence without entirely disbanding the group. More recently, the transition of the FARC in Colombia from an armed insurgency to a political party is a contemporary example of the same compellence framework in action.

Operation Infinite Reach's 1998 strikes, in response to al-Qaeda's embassy bombings, may be one of the clearest examples of the US's attempt at this version of compellence targeting a non-state group. In that instance, the strikes were aimed less at deriving a durable political settlement and more at demonstrating resolve to punish acts of violence staged against U.S. interests and personnel. The Afghan and Sudanese governments were likely also key audiences in the strike.

Finally, there are coercive approaches that, though often found in literature on non-state deterrence, would manifest as compellence if the threat of violence translated into practical use. Such techniques include older (and largely discredited) ideas of massive retaliation and collective punishment, as well as more modern iterations such as targeted assassinations.[50] These manifestations of coercion are often tactically proficient when countering terrorist actors but would prove strategically effective only if they (1) pushed a terrorist organization to negotiate, or (2) resulted in enough attrition so as to effectively dissolve a movement. As above, seapower can play a role in that coercive campaign, but it is rarely likely to be essential. Often, U.S. seapower's kinetic tools have been applied somewhat indefinitely in suppression of non-state force, less so than in the likely pursuit of a political settlement or eradication.

4.3.2 Compelling Criminals. When looking to criminal actors, compellence's clearest applicability may be at the mission level. Tactically, counter-trafficking operations employ strategies of compellence as a fundamental tool of enforcement. Operation MARTILLO, coordinated by Joint Interagency Task Force—South in the Caribbean, offers an example. Drug runners in the early 2010s had become proficient in moving cocaine from South America to Central America via routes along the Central American coast. This enabled traffickers to move narcotics from their points of origin (typically in Colombia) via sea along coastal routes to make landfall along the coast of Central America, where governments were unable to stop the flow of drugs north through Mexico into the United States. MARTILLO aimed to use the presence of U.S. and partner nation assets in the littorals to compel traffickers

further out into blue waters, where U.S. seapower predominated, shifting the advantage to the authorities.[51] As then-Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Zukunft noted, traffickers have "very few allies at sea, and that's where we do have the upper hand."[52]

At a tactical level, MARTILLO was a likely success. JIATF-S interdicted 272 metric tons of cocaine, $10.7 million in cash, and seized 198 vessels and aircraft during the first two-and-a-half years of the operation, coinciding with potential declines in trafficking up to 43% in Western Caribbean littorals.[53] It is difficult to assess the efficacy of this approach on a strategic level, however. The sums of money involved in illicit crimes are staggering,[54] the durability of the narcotics trade is impressive, and access to data on illicit activity is difficult. If interdiction is the preferred counter-narcotics approach, coercive measures at sea are likely superior to air or land-based approaches. As SOUTHCOM commander Admiral Faller noted in his 2020 posture statement, "In an operating area that is 11 times larger than the United States: the Coast Guard and JIATF-South continue to be among the best investments in the US government."[55] Yet as an overall policy for countering drug use, interdiction does not achieve strategic results. As one recent review found, from the Government Accountability Office to the CIA to RAND, assessments as far back as the late Cold War consistently reflect that "interdiction alone cannot raise cocaine traffickers' costs and risks enough to make a difference, regardless of how well [the Department of Defense] carries out its detection and monitoring mission."[56] Compellence, specifically as applied through the use of seapower, is not a big enough tool to change the risk calculus for Caribbean narcotics traffickers.

4.3.3 Summary. The applicability of compellence (persuasion through force) to terrorism varies depending on whether we understand the target of the persuasion to be an individual or a group. Use of force to persuade individuals to abandon their cause (or avoid joining in the first place) is feasible and can include a role for seapower in the delivery of that military force. The efficacy of such an approach is a different matter, and the durability of protracted terrorism campaigns shows that at least some groups can and do withstand efforts to dismantle their membership.

When looking at those groups that have proven durable, the conversation turns to a government's willingness to permit an organization to transition from violent to political over time. As one of many instruments for delivering kinetic effects to push that transition, seapower can contribute to campaigns of compellence, provided those contributions are linked to advancing some prospective political solution. The Sri Lankan military's campaign against the Tamil Tigers may be the clearest example of maritime coercion in practice, leading largely to the terror group's collapse. Yet in the cases of the IRA and the FARC, where the UK and Colombia were respectively successful in pushing terrorist campaigns into the political sphere, seapower was not a decisive factor in the protracted internal conflict.

By our criteria, a strategic action is one that helps achieve a larger political goal, and one that includes a plausible pathway to end hostilities. Naval power may have operational utility in compelling terrorist actors to abandon violence, yet the strategic effect of military campaigns is often disconnected from larger political agendas to end a conflict. (This is by no means a unique feature to seapower.) Still, the logic is at least theoretically clear. That is less the case with criminal organizations. Many types of crime are not obviously amenable to political resolution. And so, while coercive actions at sea can be tactically useful in compelling criminals to change their tactics (as in the case of Caribbean narcotics traffickers), such

approaches are not necessarily strategic because they are not linked to political goals and an end of hostilities.

V. Conclusions

The role of seapower in countering "Plus One" threats—pirates, terrorists, traffickers, and others—seems simultaneously valuable yet often non-central. We can see this across the three pillars of seapower we investigated: deterrence, assurance, and compellence.

Deterrence and compellence share some similarities, for which the evidence does not suggest that seapower has been indispensable in those efforts. The sea services surely provide means for delivering effects to deter or compel non-state adversaries. And we saw qualified successes in seapower's contributions to actions like Somali counter-piracy efforts or the Coast Guard's use of compellence as a means to gain a tactical upper hand against cartels in the Caribbean. Yet the location of the threat (largely onshore) and the frequent need for more calibrated (not to mention, non-kinetic and political) responses minimize the scope in which sea services can make *strategic* contributions to deterring or compelling non-state threats. Wayne Hughes' Corbettian invocation that the seat of purpose is on land, not at sea, helps set this conclusion in its wider context.[57]

That maxim echoes in our review of seapower and assurance as well, though here seapower plays a more substantive and truly strategic function. For those allies and partners for which the threat from non-state actors is remote (or a law enforcement issue), seapower is of some but less direct application. Yet for those nations more directly (perhaps existentially) threatened by non-state actors, U.S. seapower provides real assurances precisely because it takes the landward context into account by minimizing the U.S. footprint. Seapower can provide sustainable and over the horizon support, which may be particularly welcome in regions where U.S. presence is best served without boots on the ground (both for local considerations and U.S. domestic politics). Where U.S. power is best felt but not seen, seapower is uniquely adept to assure allies.

5.1 Lessons for Maritime Strategy

These uneven results for the role of seapower in countering non-state threats offer some food for thought, not only for the authors of the latest U.S. tri-service maritime strategy, but for this author's own work as well. In a prior monograph, we found that small-scale maritime security missions contributed to great power competition between the U.S. and its rivals. In that assessment, we concluded that preserving and reinforcing core norms at (and from the) sea—incrementally, over time—was a major feature of how the U.S. sea services could contribute to competition with China and Russia short of open conflict. We concluded that, in addition to China and Russia:

> A wider variety of actors can corrode an order so that it becomes less effective and desirable over time. Corrosion may not result in an immediate replacement of the order but can precipitate its general weakening and disintegration, which benefits the actors with the highest stakes in revising the rules (i.e., rival great powers). Preventing such corrosion is a function of long-term order maintenance. And since serious corrosion from any actor redounds to

the benefit of rival great powers, any corrosive threat to the international order is relevant to GPC.[58]

This is reflected in the latest tri-service strategy. As asserted in *Advantage at Sea*, one of the core features of sea service competition below crisis levels is that it "denies our rivals' use of incremental coercion" to reshape global norms.[59] Thus, at a level of high strategy, maritime security, and its attendant focus on smaller threats and non-state actors, links clearly to U.S. strategic objectives even in an era of competition with great powers.

And yet in this analysis, we found that some key concepts of seapower—the ideas of deterrence, assurance, and compellence—are often ill-suited for explaining how the sea services' strategic attributes relate to non-state threats. In most cases, seapower appears to play a non-strategic role in deterring, assuring, or compelling non-state threats—that is to say, naval power has operational use, but seapower is rarely strategically decisive. We are left with an unusual result, in which good order at sea is instrumental in pursuing the high-level systemic interests of U.S. policymakers, while the strategic capabilities that the sea services bring to bear seem less obviously important. This tension illustrates three important issues regarding the dynamic between non-state threats and naval power.

1. The strategic result / non-strategic capability paradox: If seapower's core attributes do not seem overwhelmingly relevant to countering non-state threats, what does that mean for the idea that promoting good order at sea is a core component of competition with great power rivals? The sea services seem to offer a strategic contribution to day-to-day competition, including denying non-state actors the opportunity to erode the value of the international maritime system. The sea services therefore extract incremental gains for the U.S. from acts that, individually, are not themselves strategic in nature. The result is a paradox, where desired strategic ends are sought through tools that are not always highly prized. In the same way that dredging may not be a strategic capability for the Chinese navy, but the long-term results of a Pacific island-building campaign are, so too is maritime security's results strategic for the U.S., even as its component parts often are not. This poses some unique challenges for the sea services, which face countervailing pressures to engage in order-maintenance activities (like countering non-state threats) while simultaneously seeking budget relief by cutting seemingly non-strategic capabilities. Whereas larger projects or operations clearly geared toward great power war (like submarine construction) may be protected, those that could be instrumental in avoiding the conditions for conflict (perhaps, Mark VI patrol boats) face higher burdens of justification. Acknowledging that tension is a necessary prerequisite for putting cost-savings into strategic context.

2. Restoring a systemic vision of seapower: Mahan's definition of seapower was opaque but we can say with confidence that it was at least system-spanning—U.S. naval power was integrated with its economic and political maritime elements.[60] The goal of identifying more observable functions of seapower in this paper, to bridge the divide between high strategy and actual naval power, led us to the concepts of deterrence, assurance, and compellence. Yet these three concepts are ultimately oriented around doing *something* to specific actors—you deter or compel adversaries, you assure your allies and partners, but in all cases, you are acting on units within the system. If seapower is central to preserving a beneficial international order,

the concept likely must be understood in terms that speak to that systemic impact, not just to the individual units. This requires, first, disarticulating seapower and naval power. Naval power is about combat credibility and is likely well-captured by the three ideas of deterrence, assurance, and compellence. Meanwhile, seapower should be more comprehensively understood, as a nexus between the sea as military maneuver space and the sea as a cornerstone of the international system. This lesson is conceptual in nature, but concepts are critical to building strategies that reflect policymaker preferences. This description of seapower also invites clearer roles for other instruments of U.S. national power, namely the economic and diplomatic contributions to seapower. Given that non-state threats are often indicative of deeper structural issues in a given region, it makes sense to assume that a more systemic understanding of seapower would make for more effective sea service contributions to countering non-state challenges.

   3. Matching strategic ends to operational means: If deterrence, assurance, and compellence do not provide a profoundly valuable construct for matching sea service attributes with their strategic directive to promote the health of the international order, what approach might bear greater fruit? In addition to the above recommendation to place seapower in its wider context, a companion approach would be to focus more on the sea services' unique operational elements. Indeed, the plurality of U.S. Navy strategies between 1970 and 2010 have been organized by capability,[61] in part because operational attributes may be the most meaningful differentiator between the various services. Along these lines, the 2007 tri-service *Cooperative Strategy* uses core capabilities as a means to describe how the sea services would implement their strategic goals, invoking operational concepts such as forward presence, deterrence, sea control, power projection, maritime security, and humanitarian assistance. Meanwhile, *Fleet Tactics* describes operational constants as: maneuver, firepower, counterforce, and command and control, many of which have clear application to targeting non-state threats.[62] As with seapower, there is no one right answer when describing the sea services' operational attributes. Moreover, a focus on operational attributes alone is unwise—there are many things the sea services are *capable* of doing, but only so much that they should *prioritize* doing. And yet an assessment of the operational contributions the sea services can deliver when countering non-state threats is valuable if guided by the larger strategic focus on the non-state actors that can present meaningful challenges to global governance.

Non-state threats will not disappear, despite the shifting U.S. focus to competition with great powers. Prior research and extant tri-service maritime strategy imply that countering non-state threats is strategically relevant to managing the risks that great powers can pose to the international system. Addressing non-state threats is also often the right thing to do. Done in partnership with host governments, helping suppress illegal fishing, or human trafficking, or piracy, or terrorism are all net positives. Consequently, it remains critical for the U.S. sea services to define how threats other than great powers integrate into maritime strategy and the application of seapower. *Advantage at Sea*, and the ebb and flow of the "Plus One" in U.S. strategy, simultaneously show that this work is as relevant as it is incomplete.

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13. William Rosenau and Zack Gold, *The Cheapest Insurance in the World? The United States and Proxy Warfare*, Center for Naval Analysis (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2019).

14. *U.S. DoD* 2020, p. 1.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Tallis 2020.

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18. Peter Swartz, *U.S. Navy Capstone Strategies and Concepts (1991–2000): Strategy, Policy, Concept, and Vision Documents*, Center for Naval Analysis (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2012), p. 32, https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA564879.

19. Swartz 2012, pp. 48–49, 89.

20. U.S. Departments of the Navy and Homeland Security, *Naval Doctrine Publication 1: Naval Warfare* (Washington, D.C.: Pentagon, March 2010), p. 22.

21. Swartz 2012, pp. 72–73.

22. Till 2013, p. 35.

23. Joshua Tallis, *The War for Muddy Waters: Pirates, Terrorists, Traffickers, and Maritime Insecurity* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019), p. 25.

24. Peter Haynes, *Towards a New Maritime Strategy: American Naval Thinking in the Post-Cold War Era* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015), pp. 217–222.

25. U.S. Departments of the Navy and Homeland Security, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* (Washington, D.C.: Pentagon, October 2007).

26. Susan J. Koch, "Proliferation Security Initiative: Origins and Evolution," *National Defense University*, occasional paper 9 (2012), pp. 4–5.

27. Joshua Tallis, "The New U.S. Maritime Strategy," *Center for International Maritime Security*, March 13, 2015, http://cimsec.org/new-us-maritime-strategy/15507, accessed October 28, 2021.

28. U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Pentagon, 2018), p. 1.

29. The early months of the Biden administration have brought renewed focus on transnational issues, as evinced in the 2021 interim National Security Strategy, though the overall NDS-inspired focus on great power competitors remains largely dominant in defense planning.

30. U.S. DoD 2020, p. 1.

31. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing Strategic Outlook," *U.S. Coast Guard*, https://www.uscg.mil/iuufishing/, accessed May 4, 2021.

32. It was not universally acknowledged after 9/11 that deterrence was applicable to terrorism. Colin Gray, writing in 2003, captured the sentiment as a "crisis of deterrence." Gray also broaches the relationship between rationality and deterrence, at a time when many commentators disputed that terrorists could be understood as rational actors. Not all terror deterrence requires the belief that terrorists themselves are rational (external elements, like financiers, may be subject to rational deterrence and thus indirectly mitigate the likelihood of an attack). Gray also notes that actors can be rational in pursuit of seemingly unreasonable objectives. Richard Betts similarly addresses the point of rationality, noting the "instrumental reasoning" behind the use of terrorism as a tactic. See Richard K. Betts, "The Soft Underbelly of American Primacy: Tactical Advantages of Terror," *Political Science Quarterly* 117(1) (Spring 2002), pp. 19–36, https://doi.org/10.2307/798092. Also noteworthy, as we will see in our analysis, is Gray's emphasis on the role of land power in post–9/11 non-state deterrence. Colin S. Gray, *Maintaining Effective Deterrence* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, August 2003).

33. Jeffrey Knopf, "The Fourth Wave in Deterrence Research," *Contemporary Security Policy* 31(1) (April 2010), p. 2, https://doi.org/10.1080/13523261003640819.

34. There is, separately, an entire specialized literature on deterring WMD terrorism, given the unique challenges of detecting radiological material, as well as the unique propagandistic value of a successful attack. See Knopf 2010, p. 18; Lewis A. Dunn, *Can Al Qaeda Be Deterred from Using Nuclear Weapons?*, Occasional Paper 3 (Washington, D.C.: NDU, July 2005).

35. Knopf 2010, pp. 3–4.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

37. Paul Davis and Brian Jenkins, *Deterrence and Influence in Counterterrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2002).; Knopf 2010, p. 11.

38. Robert F. Trager and Dessislava P. Zagorcheva, "Deterring Terrorism: It Can Be Done," *International Security* 30(3) (Winter 2005/2006), pp. 99–102, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2005.30.3.87; Knopf 2010, p. 12.

39. Knopf 2010, p. 10.

40. Davis and Jenkins 2002; Knopf 2010, p. 10.

41. Knopf 2010, p. 10.

42. Andrew Morral and Brian Jackson suggest that understanding decision-making processes can improve deterrence by denial. By characterizing how terror organizations select targets and weigh risks, they propose that deterrent measures can be made more effective. They also consider the second-order consequences of effective deterrence by denial, which may inadvertently make other targets more attractive. See Morral and Jackson, *Understanding the Role of Deterrence in Counterterrorism Security* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009), https://doi.org/10.7249/OP281.

43. Davis and Jenkins 2002; Knopf 2010, p. 12; Matthew Kroenig and Barry Pavel, "How to Deter Terrorism," *The Washington Quarterly* 35(2) (April 2012), pp. 31–33, https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2012.665339.

44. U.S. National War College, National Defense University, *Combating Terrorism in a Globalized World* (Washington, D.C.: National War College, November 2002), pp. xxii, 41; Knopf 2010, p. 13.

45. There are also non-kinetic models with potential applicability to terrorism, such as "deterrence by counter-narrative" (delegitimizing terrorist violence, thereby shrinking the pool of recruits). See Knopf 2010, p. 10.

46. See, for example, Jesse C. Johnson, Brett Ashley Leeds, and Ahra Wu, "Capabilities, Credibility, and Extended General Deterrence," *International Interactions* 41(2) (2015), https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2015.982115.

47. "The World: Osama Bin Laden, in His Own Words," *New York Times*, August 23, 1998, https://www.nytimes.com/1998/08/23/weekinreview/the-world-osama-bin-laden-in-his-own-words.html, accessed October 28, 2021.

48. Terry McKnight and Michael Hirsh, *Pirate Alley: Commanding Task Force 151 Off Somalia* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012), p. 31.

49. Ernesto Londono, "Georgia's Role as U.S. Coalition Partner Has Honed Its Army, Bolstered NATO Hopes," *Washington Post*, August 13, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/georgias-mettle-as-us-coaltion-partner-has-honed-its-army-bolstered-nato-hopes/2014/08/13/431f192a-1bea-11e4-ab7b-696c295ddfd1_story.html?utm_term=.d3a285c7f869, accessed October 28, 2021.

50. Knopf 2010, pp. 10, 14–16, 19; Daniel Whiteneck, "Deterring Terrorists: Thoughts on a Framework," *Washington Quarterly* 28(3) (2010), pp. 187–199, https://doi.org/10.1162/0163660054026452.

51. Charles Michel, "Written Statement of Rear Admiral Charles Michel: Director, JIATF South,"

Testimony before the Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, House Committee on Homeland Security, June 19, 2012.

52. Meghann Myers, "In War with Drug Traffickers, Coast Guard Stretched Thin," *Navy Times*, October 18, 2014, https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2014/10/18/in-war-with-drug-traffickers-coast-guard-stretched-thin/, accessed October 28, 2021.

53. Posture Statement of General John F. Kelly, USMC, Commander, U.S. Southern Command, before the 113th Congress, House Armed Services Committee, February 26, 2014, p. 42.

54. One estimate holds that the top seven drug trafficking organizations in Mexico net $30 billion annually. Charles Pickard, "Evolved Capabilities in Mexican Drug Trafficking: A 21st Century Profile of Transnational Organized Crime," *Small Wars Journal*, May 8, 2018, http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/evolved-capabilities-mexican-drug-trafficking-21st-century-profile-transnational-organized, accessed October 28, 2021.

55. Posture Statement, Admiral Craig S. Faller, USN, Commander, U.S. Southern Command, before the Senate Armed Services Committee, January 30, 2020, pp. 11–12.

56. Collin Fox, "Kill the Drug War: Death, Decisions, and the Limits of Military Power," *War on the Rocks*, February 25, 2021, https://warontherocks.com/2021/02/kill-the-drug-war-death-decisions-and-the-limits-of-military-power/, accessed October 28, 2021.

57. Wayne P. Hughes, Jr., and Robert P. Girrier, *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations 3rd ed.* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018), p. 24. On Corbett, see Till 2013, p. 346.

58. Tallis 2020, p. iii.

59. U.S. DoD 2020, p. 10.

60. As one example of this more systemic attitude, Mahan believed that "the principal goal of sea power was to create political leverage to bring an end to conflict on favorable terms by deranging the enemy's economy and society. The (Navy's) operational objective, the enemy fleet, was the subordinate means to the main political object." The extension of that approach means that, though "Naval officers are in the business of sharpening the point of the spear … sea power and combat capability are not the same thing."

61. Swartz 2011, p. 30.

62. Hughes and Girrier 2018, chap. 9.

Biographical Information

Joshua Tallis is a political-military analyst specializing in Arctic strategy and maritime security. He is a research scientist at the Center for Naval Analyses and an adjunct professor at The George Washington University. He holds a Ph.D. in international relations and is the author of *The War for Muddy Waters: Pirates, Terrorists, Traffickers, and Maritime Insecurity*. The views here do not reflect those of CNA or the U.S. Navy.