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US Navy strategy and force structure after the Cold War

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SUMMARY

At the end of the Cold War, the US Navy's strategy and force structure were primarily directed at fighting a conventional enemy on the high seas. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the relative certainty of the Cold War was replaced by uncertainty about the challenges of the future. A number of threats, such as regional rivalry, terrorism, transnational crime, nationalism, and ethnic and religious conflicts, rose to prominence during the 1990s, replacing the Soviet Union as the main concern.

This issue of IFS Insight investigates the Navy's strategic ideas after 1989 by addressing change and continuity in the blue water/littoral approaches to sea power in the US Navy. The blue water/littoral priorities of the Navy in this period will be illustrated by the Navy's threat perceptions, the geographical and operational focus of contemporary strategy documents, as well as the force structure and budgets.

US NAVY STRATEGY AND FORCE STRUCTURE
AFTER THE COLD WAR

APPROACHING THE LITTORALS?

The Cold War was the heyday of the blue water tradition in the US Navy, when offensive sea control and aggressive pursuit of the decisive battle were the ideals. The collapse of the Soviet Union left the US Navy's traditional approach to maritime strategy in limbo, as there were no longer any challengers to US sea control and no navy that could challenge the US Navy in a decisive battle. The US Navy responded by focusing on operations in coastal areas, so called littoral operations, in order to influence events ashore. However, for all the talk about littoral operations, there were few indications that the US Navy had abandoned its blue water legacy. Quite the contrary, this heritage was very much alive. The littoral tendency was only a slight shift of emphasis; the blue water focus remained the dominant characteristic throughout the post-Cold War period.

Although strategy is ultimately about connecting means and ends, there have been quite a few attempts to give it a more detailed definition The US Military defines strategy as a "prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives." (United States Department of Defense 2010, 349)[1] Using the Cold War as the historical background, this article investigates the Navy's strategic ideas after 1989 by addressing change and continuity in the blue water/littoral approaches to sea power within the US Navy. I divide the post-Cold War era into three distinct periods. In the first, the US Navy's focus was on the rapidly changing and unpredictable security environment of the 1990s. During the second period, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 unleashed the subsequent Global War on Terror, to become the focal point of the Navy, a focus that gradually gave way to the third phase, the re-emergence of great power rivalry in the service's strategic thinking around 2007. The blue water/littoral priorities of the Navy in these three periods will be illustrated by the Navy's perceptions of threat, geographical and operational focus of the strategic documents published at the time, as well as the force structure and budgets.[2]

THE COLD WAR

During the Cold war, US Navy ships cruised the world's oceans maintaining international order and exercising the containment policy against the Soviet Union, using sea control as the basis for power projection. In this Mahanian era, the Soviet Navy was an omnipresent threat and peer competitor and planning was primarily aimed at defeating it in battle. Following the Second World War, the Soviet Navy embarked on an ambitious blue water navy programme, and was increasingly capable of challenging the US Navy's ability to exercise sea control. In the early stages of the Cold War, Soviet sea denial capability had yet to extend beyond the immediate waters outside its territory. By the early 1970s this capability extended to the Norwegian Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Sea of Okhotsk, i.a. raising fears that the Soviet Union could deny the US Navy access to vital areas, particularly in the Norwegian Sea (Baer 1994, 394–402). The urgency of the challenge was thrown into relief by the 1973 Yom Kippur war, during which the US sent major naval forces to the Eastern Mediterranean, but was outnumbered by the Soviet Navy's assets in the area (Goldstein 2004).

Despite this new-found strength, the Soviet Navy was defensively oriented, aimed at protecting its strategic submarines in so-called bastion defence in the Barents Sea, Arctic Ocean and the Sea of Okhotsk. In so doing, the Soviet Navy would preserve its nuclear strike capability behind a solid defence of both surface and submarine forces. The trade-off was a limitation on their ability to attack allied shipping, although they still had the capability to do so if it was necessary or desirable. In 1977, the US Navy started on a course to change its strategy in order to exploit this weakness (Baer 1994, 418–422). This process produced a number of classified strategies and culminated with the publication

of the unclassified *The Maritime Strategy* in January 1986, which was the last, published, official strategy for 21 years (Hattendorf 2004, 2008).

The Maritime Strategy was largely based on Alfred T. Mahan's notions of command of the sea. As the most prominent advocate of the blue water tendency, Mahan believed the ability to control the world's oceans was the main purpose of a great nation's navy. Command of the sea was indivisible, and the primary means to attain it was to aggressively pursue the decisive battle (Till 2009, 51–54). *The Maritime Strategy* thus embraced an offensive attitude by shifting the balance from convoy escort to attacking the aforementioned Soviet bastions and deploying ground and air forces on the Soviet flanks, more specifically in Norway, Turkey and Japan. This strategy had several aims. It was designed to deter the Soviet Union from going to war in the first place, and would reassure and support exposed allies in times of crisis. In case of war, the first priority was to take out the Soviet Union's maritime component in the nuclear deterrence. After destroying the Soviet Navy, the US Navy would turn its attention to the battle raging in central Europe, if indirectly. By "carrying the fight to the enemy", including the Soviet homeland, the Navy would divert Soviet forces from the ground war in central Europe, as well as maintaining an unbroken line of supply to the allied forces in Europe by preventing Soviet Naval assets from engaging in convoy attack in the Atlantic. In short, the US Navy picked Europe as the main theatre of war for engaging its blue water force in a Mahanian battle against the Soviet threat.

Concurrent with the development of *The Maritime Strategy*, the Cold War entered one of its tenser periods with US–Soviet relations turning frosty, a process that was reinforced by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. The cooler international climate led to increased defence spending and during the two presidential terms of Ronald Reagan the US defence budget increased by nearly 35 per cent from $138 billion in 1981, to $186 in 1988 (fiscal year 2011 dollars). In large part this increase in defence spending facilitated the implementation of *The Maritime Strategy*, as it presupposed a significant increase in the US Navy force structure. In fact, Secretary of the Navy John Lehman published his justification for the naval build up in his article "The 600 Ship Navy", together with *The Maritime Strategy*. This naval build up was accompanied by a significant increase in capabilities of the individual platforms with the introduction of a range of new, state-of-the-art, ships, aircraft, weapons and sensors. Thus, the US Navy came out of the Cold War on a high with regards to its equipment and strategy.

THE 1990S: THE ABSENCE OF THREATS AND THE LITTORAL TENDENCY

The triumphalism that followed victory in the Cold War was not without a bitter aftertaste for the US Navy. Without the Soviet Union as an enemy, the threat on which the *Maritime Strategy* was based had disappeared, and so had the rationale for the generous budgets that came with it. As George Baer states, in the last chapter of his history of the US Navy, "With the disappearing danger of general war, the value of a massive US offensive naval response disappeared also. In 1989 the US Navy put its ambitious testament to sea power 'on the shelf.'" (Baer 1994, 444). Two years later, the US Navy was left in a supporting role to the Air Force and Army during the first Gulf War.

The challenges of the 1990s were many, and although the Cold War threats were gone, there were arguments in favour of maintaining relatively large naval forces, the most central being the versatility of naval forces, a capability described in Geoffrey Till's book on maritime strategy (2009). The argument goes that naval forces are rarely used for their intended purpose, which is naval combat. It is their ability to exploit the international commons, their mobility and their status as symbols of power that makes them useful for anything from diplomatic missions to a full-scale naval battle between peer competitors. At the end of the Cold War, the US Navy was very versatile, but was lacking in the area of littoral op-

erations, which demand markedly different training, equipment and doctrine than blue water operations.

Despite the argument about naval versatility, the fall of the Wall presented the US Navy with a major challenge in the 1990s: the obvious lack of a tangible, hard security threat brought with it uncertainty as to which threats and challenges the future would bring, and the US Navy struggled to figure out its approach to this new situation. At the same time, China started figuring more heavily as a regional power, although this did not greatly affect the priority of Europe in the force structure. Throughout the 1990s, the Cold War distribution between the Atlantic and Pacific fleet, with 55 per cent based in the former and 45 per cent in the latter, remained unchanged. In addition to strategic uncertainty, the armed forces in general were having to deal with the "peace dividend" in the form of declining budgets and a reduced force structure. Coupled with the relatively large budget deficits facing the Bush administration at the time, the resource situation would clearly deteriorate. With his *Base Force* concept of 1990, General Colin Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), sought to update the plans of the US military.[3] He expected the armed forces to shrink by 25 per cent, and the composition of its forces restructured to be better equipped for meeting the challenges of the new decade, and ultimately the new millennium. Technological developments also meant that equipment came at an ever-increasing real-price, making each ship more expensive by the year.

Accepting the changes in the security environment, the strategic documents of the 1990s intended to make use of the superior US blue water capabilities to project power into the littorals and influence events ashore.[4] However, a careful reading of these documents, and an analysis of the current and planned force structure as well as the budgets, reveal that Mahan's thoughts were far from buried. On the contrary, they were very much alive throughout the entire decade, showing that the littoral tendency was a shift in emphasis, not a complete transformation from a blue water to a littoral force. The main emphasis thus remained on the traditional blue water Navy of the Cold War, with increased importance attributed to the littoral operations.

THE WAY AHEAD: SAILING INTO THE LITTORALS?

The challenges of the post-Cold War era are spelled out in the US Navy capstone strategic documents of the decade. The first strategic publication after the Cold War, *The Way Ahead*, was published in April 1991, only a month after the end of the hostilities of the first Gulf War and in the middle of the process that would end in the official dissolution of the Soviet Union on 26. December 1991 (Swartz 2010, 188, 276). The authors recognised these challenges, and made the initial move towards placing a heavier emphasis on littoral capabilities, although without saying so explicitly.

Referring to the unravelling Soviet empire, the authors stated, "[n]o longer do we have the sense of certainty that accompanies a bipolar power structure and a central, agreed-upon threat." Indeed, they concluded: "It is time to challenge many of our ground rules and assumptions." (United States Navy 1991, 24) *The Way Ahead* did this to a greater degree than perhaps any other strategic document published in the 1990s. All the same, its influence was rather limited, something the naval historian John Hattendorf puts down to the diverting effect of public relations scandals and the immediate needs of active operations overseas (the operations in the Persian Gulf), but also the quite radical changes that were outlined (Hattendorf 2006, 24). Nevertheless, *The Way Ahead* deserves a more thorough analysis as it reflected the views of senior officers and officials at the Department of the Navy, first and foremost the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Frank B. Kelso, but also the Secretary of the Navy, H. Lawrence Garret III and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Alfred M. Gray. Instead of referring to threats, *The Way Ahead* presented a range of challenges for the new decade:

> Drives for regional hegemony, resurgent nationalism, ethnic and religious rivalries, drug trafficking,

and terrorism are certain to challenge international order during the final decade of this century. Within developing nations, dramatic increases in population and growing dissatisfaction with the perpetual gap between rich and poor will continue to be major causes of unrest and insurgency (United States Navy 1991, 25).

These predictions proved in the event quite accurate, although the references to them were quite vague and undeveloped, indicating that the US Navy was uncertain of their extent and geographical location, and had problems finding its place in the new security environment.

At the time of *The Way Ahead*'s publication, the Soviet Union still existed. Although *The Maritime Strategy* remained a backup option in the case of a Soviet resurgence, the global war scenario was receding, and with it two very significant changes are to be found. The first pertains to the geographical focus of the strategy. The US Navy had been global in its operations throughout the Cold War, though with priority given to the North Atlantic and the European Continent. In *The Way Ahead*, the authors signalled a possible reduced importance for Europe, recognising a need to "focus on regional contingencies in trouble spots", wherever US national interests were involved (United States Navy 1991, 26). The question then was how the US Navy best could influence the events in these trouble spots, which brings us to the second change, namely a re-examination of the high seas focus of the Cold War.

> Control of the air, sea, and undersea environments, essential to successful military operations on land, will take on a different character but certainly will be as complex as maintaining control in an open-ocean environment (United States Navy 1991, 28).

Influencing events on land requires naval forces to operate in coastal waters. This quote takes sea control as a given and implicitly warns of an increasing emphasis on littoral operations, stressing the essential contribution of naval forces to operations on land and the changing character of sea control. It

would be easy to attribute the emphasis on regional contingencies, and the naval forces' contribution to operations ashore, to the influence of the first Gulf War. The Navy was unhappy about its role and performance in the first Gulf War, the reasons for which will be explained below. However, it was unlikely that they had any significant influence, since combat operations had finished only a month before publication, leaving little time to evaluate the lessons and incorporate them into the document.

With regards to the resource situation, major budget cuts had been made. In 1991, the US Navy budget amounted to $162 billion, down from $165 billion the year before,[5] while personnel counted 571,000, down from 583,000 in 1990. These cuts were only the beginning of a decade of budget reductions, and the new circumstances that faced the US Navy were recognised in its first major strategic publication. To handle the situation, *The Way Ahead* echoed the Base Force concept (a review of the US Military which recommended cutting the Navy to a maximum of 400 ships, or 25 per cent, by 1994/95) in stating that it would be "transferring roughly 25% of our [the US Navy's] current inventory of surface combatants, the *Knox* (FF-1052) class frigates, to the reserves." The frigates of the US Navy are primarily meant for anti submarine warfare and escort duties, and during the Cold War their primary role was to secure the safe transit of men and equipment from the US to other theatres of War, basically Europe. With no specific threat to maritime lines of communication, there was no great need for frigates, and retiring these ships would make room for other capabilities that were needed in the post-Cold War era, including littoral capabilities.

In addition to the frigates, a number of other cuts were planned, reducing the force structure significantly from the current number of 526 ships. Although one expected a total reduction of 25 per cent (to around 400 ships in total), the force level goal at the time was 451 ships. It produced a discrepancy of over 50 ships. One explanation for this is that many of the ships slated for decommissioning would be replaced. Strictly speaking, the passage quoted above does not state whether the Navy intended to

reduce its forces by 25 per cent, only that it would get rid of a certain class of frigates. What advantages this "deception" would bring are hard to assess. Another, less conspiratorial explanation puts it down to different ways of counting ships. Nevertheless, warnings of the force reductions were not empty rhetoric, and by the end of the decade, the US Navy force structure had indeed been reduced by 44 per cent compared to the 1991 levels (O'Rourke 2010).

… FROM THE SEA

Published in September 1992, *…From the Sea* is one of the most widely cited Navy documents of the post-Cold War period, gaining prominence as an expression of US Navy and Marine Corps strategic thinking. The document was designed to take the US Navy into the 21st century, and was debated widely both in Navy and civilian circles. Its primary aim was "to engender a fundamental shift in naval thinking-away from the open ocean confrontation with the Soviet Navy, and toward a much more subtle and more flexible use of naval forces commensurate with a more uncertain strategic environment" (Smith 1999, 267) and to "overcome *Desert Storm's* [the first Gulf War] negative legacy" (Swartz 2010, 679) in the US Navy. The general perception of that conflict within the service was that it had been left in a purely supporting role, without much influence on events. *From the Sea* was designed to make the Navy relevant in the post-Cold War era by doing exactly what the title suggests, influencing events on land *from the sea*.

With regards to challenges and threats, *From the Sea* was even less specific than *The Way Ahead*, describing them in a very elusive way as "uncertainty in regions critical to our national interest." (United States Navy 1992, 89). *The Way Ahead* listed a range of strategic challenges likely to be prevalent in the future, but many of these would be absent from *From the Sea.* Apart from vague references to regional crisis response, strongly influenced by the lessons learned from the Gulf War where the US had faced a regional power and defeated it in regular combat, there were no attempts to give any indications of specific threats. *From the Sea* was not based on what the US Navy perceived as maritime or naval threats and challenges to the United States, but on what the Navy could, or wanted to be able to do. This trait was common to all of the documents published in the 1990s.

What the US Navy wanted to do was to conduct littoral operations aimed at influencing events ashore, as Rhodes says, "'…From the Sea' unequivocally endorsed a littoral approach" (Rhodes 1999, 13). While there was little discussion of the sea control dimension in the document, there was a clear policy statement: "[w]ith the demise of the Soviet Union, the free nations of the world claim preeminent control of the seas and ensure freedom of commercial maritime passage." (United States Navy 1992, 89). Given control of the high seas, the reasoning went, the remaining areas of likely contention were the littorals. To reiterate, the littorals were defined as the "'near land' areas of the world", and they were divided into two segments, seaward and landward. The seaward segment was "[t]he area from the open ocean to the shore which must be controlled to support operations ashore", while the landward segment was "[t]he area inland from shore that can be supported and defended directly from the sea." (United States Navy 1992, 92). That this was a significant proportion of the world's land mass was aptly illustrated by this map:
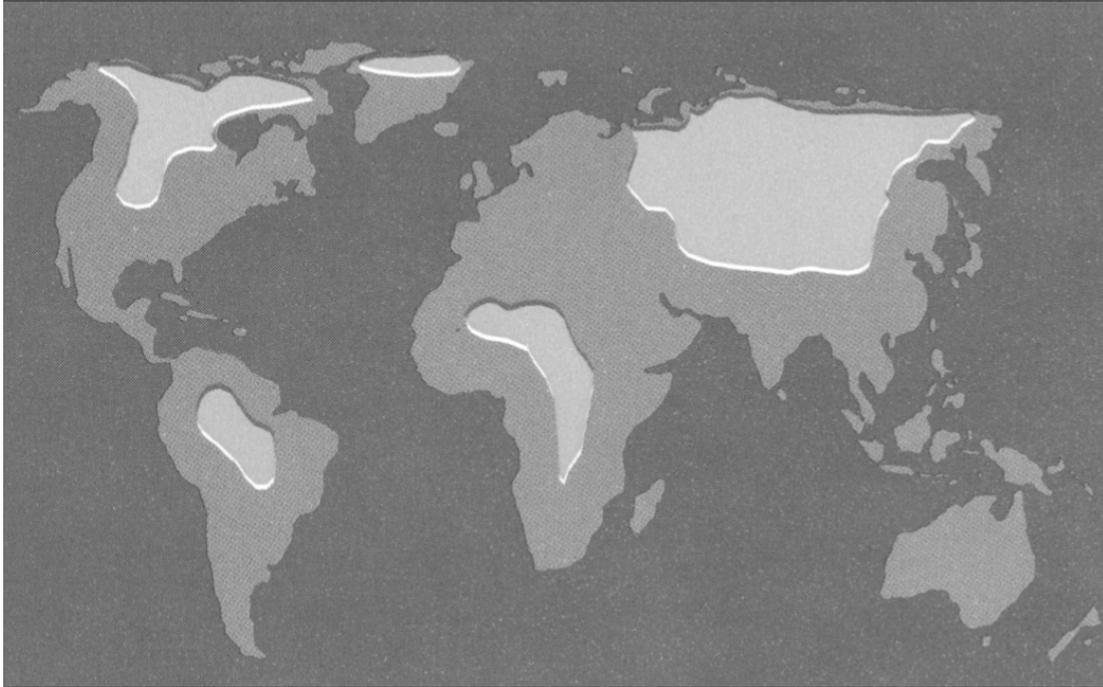
FIGURE 1: The map illustrates which parts of the world are within 650 nautical miles of the coastal region, considered to be the range of naval strike. The authors of From the Sea defined these areas to be a part of the littorals.

= Within 650 nautical miles of coastal region, the striking range of Naval Forces.
(United States Navy 1992, 92)

Although confident of US Navy capabilities, warnings were issued against assuming control of the coastal areas on the basis of the command of the sea exercised by the US Navy at the time. The primary concerns were the threats posed by submarines, mines, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles. The strong littoral orientation of *From the Sea* continued the changes initiated by *The Way Ahead*, cementing the move away from the blue water focus of the Cold War.

Despite the uncertainties of the post-Cold War world, one thing seems to have been regarded as a "safe bet": There seemed to be general consensus within the US Navy that, after its official dissolution in 1991, there would be no Soviet resurgence; indeed, the country was only mentioned twice in the entire document, both with reference to its demise. Perhaps as a result of this, the greatest difference in geographical focus between *The Way Ahead* and *From the Sea* was that Europe was not mentioned in the latter. This could be interpreted as a confirmation of the reduced importance of Europe and the

Atlantic as an operational theatre, but retaining close relation with European navies in operations elsewhere, like the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Africa and the Caribbean. *From the Sea* advocated a global commitment with a specific reference to regional conflict, although not as explicitly as *The Way Ahead*. This generality, both in terms of threats and geographic priorities, comes across in the proposed tasks of the US Navy: "Our forces can help to shape the future in ways favorable to our interests by underpinning our alliances, precluding threats, and helping to preserve the strategic position we won with the end of the Cold War." (United States Navy 1992, 89). This is very general, and avoids drawing up any priorities, reinforcing the impression that the US Navy was having difficulties finding its place in the 1990s. Seen as a whole, *From the Sea* avoided making choices on what it considered to be threats and challenges, and the geographic area on which to focus. The only real choice it made was to make explicit the littoral focus of *The Way Ahead*, but whether this was a choice that was seen to entail substantive changes to the organisation is open to question.

What is interesting about the period around the publication of *From the Sea* is that the significant changes in operating environment addressed in *The Way Ahead* were carried over and extended in the new strategic document, without grounding them in any particular threat or challenge. Combined with the lack of visible change in the current and planned force structure, it suggests a navy that was struggling to find its proper place in a thoroughly transformed security environment.

In other words, *From the Sea* amplified the sense of uncertainty concerning threats and challenges, and the US Navy's place in the new strategic environment. The US Navy seemed to be uncertain of what constituted these changes and how they affected the Naval Services, and this sense of uncertainty seemed to be reflected in their insistence on a scaled-down Cold War-style force structure in its shipbuilding programmes. At the time, the Department of Defense configured its force sizing requirements at being able to win two major regional wars at the same time; the Battle Force goal had not changed since *The Way Ahead*, and stayed at 451 ships.

The end of the Cold War and the Gulf War together created fears that the US Navy "could possibly be considered less relevant to post-Cold War environment & [sic] conflicts than other services." (Swartz 2010, 343). Considering the declining budgets and the expectations of a peace dividend, this was a major concern as it could potentially leave the Navy in a very difficult position if this attitude gained foothold in political circles. By 1992, the budget had been cut by $19 billion from 1991, and amounted to $143 billion. The number of personnel was declining as well, down by 29,000 to a total of 542,000 since 1991 (Swartz 2010, 276). Avoiding being side-lined by the other services was perhaps especially important in the autumn of 1992, with presidential elections in the offing, and it was important to have a strategic platform ready in the case of a change of administration (the elections ousted President George H. W. Bush from office after one term, and President Bill Clinton was inaugurated on January 20, 1993.

In an environment of budget cuts, there were few incentives to invest in new programmes aimed at littoral operations. The logical course was to adapt the existing force structure to the "two major regional wars", or littoral, standard. Nevertheless, as Peter Swartz has pointed out, some of the criticism of the strategy concerned the lack of programmes, and funds, to back up the littoral focus of *From the Sea* (2010, 708). This is evident also in the 1992 Posture Statement. All of the programmes cited in this document were either based on, or direct continuations of, Cold War legacy platforms, with no clear attempts to adjust them to operating in the littorals. While "Navy force structure will be prioritized in favor of a ship mix optimized to project power ashore in regional crises in support of the national strategy", there was no real effort to increase the proportion of ships capable of operating in the littorals (United States Navy 1992, 18, 25).

The only shipbuilding programme that can be said to have had a distinctly littoral aim was the new class of amphibious ships, although it would only replace predecessors already programmed for retirement (United States Navy 1992, 25–26). Important to note, however, is the fact that this new class would be significantly larger and represent a real improvement in amphibious capabilities. Furthermore, the Navy invested considerable resources in new aircraft, weapons systems and sensors, such as precision guided ammunition, the [F-18 fighter aircraft](#) and the [AEGIS combat system](#), giving very real increases in Navy littoral capabilities. Nevertheless, the conclusion, then, seems to be there were no new *shipbuilding* programmes specifically aimed at operating in the littorals, and, with the addition of new technology, the old force structure seemed to be considered capable of fulfilling the aims of the new strategy. This indicates that the Navy was not prepared to wholly commit to a littoral strategy, and preferred to hedge its bets. This is neither unreasonable nor surprising: *From the Sea* was criticised internally for neglecting the blue water aspect of naval operations, suggesting resistance to the littoral focus in the Navy (Swartz 2010, 709).

FORWARD FROM THE SEA: RESTORING MAHAN?

Forward From the Sea was published in November 1994, two years after *From the Sea*, and was intended to update and expand "the strategic concepts articulated in [the US Navy's] 1992 paper to address specifically the unique contributions of naval expeditionary forces in peacetime operations, in responding to crises, and in regional conflicts." (United States Navy 1994, 150). The document was published in the second year of the Clinton administration amid declining budgets and turmoil in the Balkans and Somalia, and the document articulated a partial reversal of the littoral path taken in *From the Sea*.

The first and most obvious update in the context of this article is the clarification of the most prominent threat, or challenge, in the current security environment. Referring to the 1993 *Bottom-Up Review* and the 1994 *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, it was stated that

> A major review of strategy and force requirements resulted in a shift in the Department of Defense's focus to new dangers—chief among which is aggression by regional powers—and the necessity for our military forces to be able to rapidly project decisive military power to protect vital U.S. interests and defend friends and allies (United States Navy 1994, 151).

With the 1991 Gulf War and the Balkan civil war in mind, and with the Pentagon still force-sizing for two major regional wars, aggression by regional powers was considered to be the most imminent threat. This made *Forward From the* Sea somewhat more concrete on the threat issue than *From the Sea,* although it was still fairly general. It did not define the scope of the threat or its location, nor did it address issues such as terrorism, piracy, drug trafficking and specific threats to the US homeland. Possibly influenced by internal opposition to the littoral approach, strategic thinking was geared to meeting the challenge of regional aggressors primarily by naval forces designed to win wars, reaffirming the importance of traditional sea control operations in an apparent attempt to satisfy both littoral and blue water proponents.

More specifically, the Navy's primary warfighting contribution was in four different areas: strategic deterrence (which refers to the United States' nuclear weapons); sea control; maritime supremacy; and finally strategic sealift, defined by the US Department of Defense as "[t]he afloat pre-positioning and ocean movement of military materiel in support of US and multinational forces. Sealift forces include organic [part of the US Navy] and commercially acquired shipping and shipping services, including chartered foreign-flag vessels and associated shipping services." (United States Department of Defense 2010, 517) In addition to such conventional naval tasks, there was for the first time an emphasis on preventing conflicts (Swartz 2010, 384). This was grounded in "recent experiences", but without further explanation of which experiences. It probably referred primarily to the First Gulf War, but also to the Balkan conflicts and the Somali civil war which were ongoing at the time. What this actually entailed was not explained, except that it presupposed the forward presence of US Naval vessels and ability to conduct power projection.

To project power, the US Navy had to operate in the littorals, which continued to be a priority for the US Navy in *Forward From the Sea*. The strategy thus provided some continuity on this issue, although the littoral dimension was less prominent than in the previous strategy. In the document, there is a graph detailing "Support of Littoral Warfare" to about 20 per cent of the total Navy budget in 1994. As was pointed out previously, the Department of the Navy was criticised for not backing up the littoral focus of the previous strategy with the appropriate investments in littoral programmes, and this was probably intended to meet that criticism by showing substantial investments. There was, however, no definition of what "support of littoral warfare" meant in practice, and no references to the source of these numbers, making it difficult to put them in perspective. It also makes the document seem like a balancing act between policies favouring a stronger littoral accent and those advocating a blue water focus.

Furthermore, the geographical priorities seem to have been shifting. Referring to the United States as a maritime nation, vital US national interests

were said to be at the "endpoint of 'highways of the seas'", and these "endpoints coincide with the places to which we routinely deploy naval expeditionary forces: the Atlantic, Mediterranean, Pacific, Indian Ocean, Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and Caribbean Sea." The "endpoints of these highways" obviously refers to populated areas along the coast, re-affirming the importance of the littorals. Looking at the areas considered to be of vital national interest, and thus the most relevant areas for conducting littoral operations in, there are detectable signs of change from the Cold War operating theatres. The mentioning of the Indian Ocean, not traditionally an area of focus for the US Navy, was quite new. So was the realisation that "[r]eductions in fiscal resources […] dictate that we must refocus our more limited naval assets on the highest priorities and the most immediate challenges, even within these areas of historic and vital interest to the United States." (United States Navy 1994, 151) Although the manner in which these regions would be prioritised was not specified, it suggests that European waters, and particularly the Atlantic region, having been the main focus of the US Navy throughout the Cold War, were losing some of their pre-eminence. The Mediterranean was perhaps an exception, considering the operations in the Balkans.

This is quite significant, as it was the first time that an official US Navy strategy had seriously reviewed the geographical priorities after the Cold War, and was possibly a harbinger of the shift in the balance of forces from the Atlantic to the Pacific that would take place 15 years later. At the time, though, there were no changes in the distribution of ships. The ships based in the Atlantic totalled 55 per cent of the fleet, while the rest was based in the Pacific (the US Navy had four active fleets at the time, the 2nd and 6th fleet operated in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean respectively, 3rd fleet in the Eastern Pacific and 7th in the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean).

The force structure goal at the time was a total of 346 ships, a significant reduction from the previous 451 ships, but still significantly below the 391 ships that made up the US Navy at the time. And the declining budget made it clear that force levels would continue to drop. The Navy's budget had at this point declined to $117 billion, down $15 billion from 1993, and the total number of personnel had declined to 469,000, down by 41,000 from 1993. In the midst of an economic recovery, the Clinton administration was still planning cuts in the defence budget, although they would not be as dramatic as they were in the first four years of the 1990s (Swartz 2010, 276). The force composition plans at the time were similar to those of 1992, and without specific programmes aimed at the littorals, *Forward From the Sea*, just like *From the Sea*, was criticised for the lack of tangible investments in littoral capabilities.

ANYTIME, ANYWHERE: A NAVY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Published in 1997, *Anytime, Anywhere* was the last strategic document of the 1990s, and a strategic vision of how the US Navy intended to approach the current and future security environment. It was not, however, intended to supersede *From the Sea* or *Forward From the Sea*. The vision contained a renewed emphasis on traditional sea control operations, although it did not address any strategic threats or challenges. The closest it got was to reintroduce concerns about anti access weapons, which are designed to prevent an enemy, in this case the US, from gaining access to an area.

> I [Admiral Johnson, Chief of Naval Operations] anticipate that the next century will see [our] foes striving to target concentrations of troops and materiel ashore and attack our forces at sea and in the air. This is more than a sea-denial threat or a Navy problem; it is an area-denial threat whose defeat or negation will become the single most crucial element in projecting and sustaining US military power where it is needed (United States Navy 1997, 174).

The new emphasis on sea control was fairly clear in that Mahan was regarded as a highly relevant reference point for the US Navy: "Mahan was right: navies are about more than just fighting other navies; they are powerful instruments of national policy whose special strength stems from their ability to command the seas." This development was clearly influenced by the 1995–1996 Taiwan Straits Cri-

sis, where China accused Washington of encouraging Taiwan to "seek formal sovereign independence" from China (Ross 2000, 88). The event that triggered the crisis was the USA's granting of a visa to the Taiwanese president, reversing a long standing practice, to attend a reunion at a US university. China reacted by conducting several missile tests close to Taiwan. The ensuing tension between the US and China prompted Washington to send several warships, including two carrier battle groups, to the region, and it is likely the potential for armed conflict with China prompted the US Navy to once again emphasise blue water operations. Furthermore, and more or less precluding any potential amphibious operations, there was a general sense of scepticism in the US to ground intervention overseas, primarily as a result of the casualties sustained in the failed United Nations intervention in the Somali civil war. Starting as a purely humanitarian venture in 1992, the UN forces ultimately became embroiled in the internal Somali power struggle when they started targeting the forces of a local warlord. The US commitment ended after 18 US soldiers and thousands of Somalis were killed in a fire-fight in the Somali capital of Mogadishu in October 1993.

Although these events influenced the authors of *Anytime, Anywhere*, one must not credit them with single-handedly facilitating the return of Mahan to US Navy strategy. It is hard to imagine this miniature "Mahanian renaissance" as the sole product of these incidents, though they probably catalysed the return to theories and sentiments that were still very much alive in the US Navy. Despite this renewed interest in Mahan's theories, the littorals had not been forgotten by the authors: "As precision weapons become cheaper and more numerous, naval dominance of the littorals will acquire a new scale and importance." (United States Navy 1997, 175) The dominance of the littorals was to be merged seamlessly with traditional sea control in order to create what was termed 'expanded sea control', once again in an effort to balance littoral and blue water policies. In addition, control over land areas was considered to be equally important in order to defend the Navy's assets. This area control was predicted to combine with battlespace dominance, and in concert they would

encompass everything from an information warfare battle of surveillance systems, to precise strikes against critical surveillance nodes, to theater missile defense, to command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) and a cooperative engagement capability that includes a comprehensive defense of both the fleet and forces ashore (United States Navy 1997, 174).

The emphasis on area control and battlespace dominance was a further development of the Navy Operational Concept (NOC), published only a few months before. One of the key individuals behind the NOC, Vice Adm. Arthur K. Cebrowski, developed the network-centric warfare concept, which was published a month after the NOC (Hattendorf 2006, 160). The network-centric warfare concept uses information technology in order to integrate ships, aircraft and shore installations into computer networks. These networks facilitate the exchange of large amounts of information, allowing all units to have a common picture of a combat situation. This means, in simplified terms, that everyone knows where friendly units are and what they are doing, and all available information about the enemy is shared instantly. In addition to influencing *Anytime, Anywhere* and the Navy, the concept has had a major impact on the US military in general. The technological advances that facilitated this concept, and other technologies as well, increased capabilities both on the high seas and in the littorals but also made them ever more expensive, and in the 1990s' climate of depleting budgets it only added to the difficult economic situation.

Although *Anytime, Anywhere* did not address the geographical priorities of the US Navy, the Navy leadership had clearly made some decisions regarding this issue. The most obvious was the creation of the 5th fleet in 1995, with headquarters in Bahrain and the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and Arabian Sea as its area of responsibility.

The force goal of the Navy at the time had been reduced to 305 ships, still below the current force level of 357 ships. With regards to the shipbuild-

ing programmes that were planned at the time, there was one significant development in the three years that had passed since *Forward From the Sea* was published. The US Navy was planning a 21st century destroyer intended to operate in the littorals, and the Navy wanted a total of 32 hulls.[6] Being the first littoral-specific programme of the 1990s, it received its first mention in the Posture Statements in the 1997 version, but had been discussed inside the Navy since the early/mid 1990s (O'Rourke 2010, 3). In 1999, the Navy initiated the Streetfighter project, intended to produce a relatively small ship tailored to traditional naval combat in littoral waters; it was never translated into a shipbuilding programme, however. Instead, the Navy started the Littoral Combat Ship programme in 2001.

INTO THE LITTORALS …
WITH A BLUE WATER NAVY

Overall, the picture that emerges of the 1990s is that of a navy lacking in strategic direction. While the US Navy was quick to understand the need to adapt strategies to the post-Cold War situation, it never produced a strategy that identified threats and provided resources and guidance to meet those threats. What it did do was focus on operations, sailing from the high seas and into the littorals. As Edward Rhodes put it,

> Central to the Navy's effort to link naval power to national security in the new century has been the rejection of Mahanian notions of naval power, with their emphasis on the control of the international commons, and the embrace of the assumption that to be relevant to American security objectives, naval power must be applied "from the sea" against sovereign transoceanic actors (Rhodes 1999, 1).

In the absence of a Soviet threat or other major conventional challenger, the documents emphasised the littorals, if to varying degrees. The strategies also opened up for a change in the geographic priorities of the US Navy, although no major revision of priorities took place.

The lack of strategic direction was evident in the strategies' approach to force structure, as well as the current and planned force structure throughout the 1990s. In all three cases, the strategies aimed mainly at blue water operations. The strategists' long-standing insistence on using the Cold War-legacy platforms in the littorals and their assertion in *Anytime, Anywhere* that "Mahan was right", suggests that the idea of blue water operations was never discarded. And despite the plans for a new littoral combatant in the form of a new destroyer, shipbuilding plans between 1991 and 1997 suggest that blue water operations retained a prominent position in the US Navy, and that *Anytime, Anywhere* was more representative of the mindset of the US Navy than many of the other strategic documents. The above-quoted passage by Rhodes therefore needs correcting, as Mahan was far from being rejected in the US Navy during the 1990s. Increasing interest in the Mahanian tradition towards the end of the decade can be seen in connection with the rising power of China, another issue attracting widening concern, especially after the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995–1996. Consequently, rather than a full scale conversion to a littoral navy, a *balance* was struck between Mahan's blue water school and a littoral direction with an emphasis on Mahan.

This balance is particularly evident in the force structure figures and shipbuilding plans of the decade.

The process of downsizing the Navy was part and parcel of the effort to downsize US armed forces in general, and started with the Base Force concept. As was previously pointed out, the US Navy lost 44 per cent of its size in this decade, a sizeable cut, much of it what is termed "other" ships, primarily logistics and support ships. The combat capable ships were reduced by 41 per cent, and some ship categories stand out. The strategic submarines lost much of their rationale with the end of the Cold War, and were reduced by 50 per cent. The number of attack submarines was reduced drastically in the 1990s. Being designed essentially for open ocean combat, these ships were one of the US Navy's major blue water capabilities, and the cut from 96 to 57 nuclear powered hulls was a substantial 41 per cent reduction. With the additional loss of three conventionally powered submarines, much of the Navy's blue water capability was removed. And as with the at-

tack submarines the number of major surface ships was reduced quite drastically. The Battleships had first been decommissioned in 1969, only to be recommissioned with the naval build up of the 1980s. They had been obsolete for quite a few years in the blue water navy of the Cold War, but their decommissioning was lamented by the Marine Corps due to their shore bombardment capabilities. More relevant than the scrapping of an obsolete class of ships from World War Two was the decommissioning of large numbers frigates. Their numbers were reduced by a substantial 63 per cent from 1989 to 1999 which made up the bulk of the cuts in surface warships. As mentioned above, the decision to reduce the number of frigates was taken in the early 1990s. The frigates were being decommissioned because they were "primarily designed for the ASW [anti submarine warfare] convoy mission" (United States Navy 1991, 34), a mission that was thought would lose some of its importance in the absence of the Soviet Navy. The decommissioning of the frigates left more room for focusing on post-Cold War missions, like littoral combat.

Looking at other types of ships, there are a few types of hulls that stand out on the basis of changes in their number. First of all, patrol craft did not disappear from the US Navy, they were just not included in the Battle Force anymore. Exclusively littoral combatants, they were nevertheless primarily intended for homeland security missions, and, with a total of 14 hulls, they were too few to significantly increase the littoral capabilities of the US Navy. The increasing number of mine warfare ships is a sign that littoral operations were considered more important in the 1990s. Constituting a major threat to a littoral operation, mines would need to be cleared if the US Navy was serious about securing access to coastal regions, a lesson that was learned during the 1991 Gulf War, when mines hampered operations. Another essential littoral capability, the contingent of amphibious ships, was slashed by 37 per cent. Questions can be raised as to why the amphibious capabilities, highly relevant to littoral operations, were reduced to the extent that they were, however one must be careful not to jump to conclusions, as the old ships were being replaced by significantly more capable ones.

But this increase in capabilities was a general trait of the 1990s, affecting not only the amphibious ships or the US Navy, but many of the armed forces around the world. Many of the US Navy's old ships, weapons systems and sensors were being replaced by cutting edge systems that significantly increased each individual ship's capabilities, so the reduction in fleet size did not result in a proportionate reduction in capabilities. Some of these new systems were intended for operations in the littorals, like the Tomahawk missile, but they did not represent a major effort to go from a blue water Navy to a littoral Navy. Also, the great majority of ships and shipbuilding plans focused on blue water hulls, the exceptions being the planning of a new littoral destroyer and the Streetfighter concept, although these plans had not translated into concrete programmes by the turn of the 21st century. It is therefore safe to conclude that the Navy at the onset of the new millennium was, both in its strategies and force structure, essentially a scaled down Cold War version incorporating limited littoral capabilities.

SHIP CATEGORY	FY1989	FY1994	FY1999	% CUT/INCREASE
Strategic Submarines	36	18	18	-50 %
Cruise missile Submarines	0	0	0	
Nuclear fuelled attack submarines	96	88	57	-41 %
Conventional attack submarine	3	0	0	-100 %
Aircraft Carriers	15	12	12	-20 %
Battleship	4	0	0	-100 %
Cruiser	40	35	27	-33 %
Destroyer	68	41	52	-24 %
Frigate	100	51	37	-63 %
LCS	0	0	0	
Patrol craft	6	0	0	-100 %
Mine warfare	5	15	16	220 %
Amphibious[7]	65	42	41	-37 %
Other	128	89	57	-55 %
Total	566	391	317	-44 %

TABLE 1: This table shows the total number of ships in the Battle Force of the US Navy and the percentage cut or increase during the 1990s. Click on the ship category for more information about the ships. Conventional submarines are not linked to any source, as the US Navy has decommissioned all the ships and no longer have any fact files on them. For links on the amphibious ships, see endnote 7. (O'Rourke 2010)

GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

On October 12, 2000, the destroyer *USS Cole* was struck by a suicide bomber using a small boat loaded with explosives. This attack marked the start of the rise of terrorism in US security policy, and prompted the US Navy to take immediate steps to increase port, harbour and coastal defence forces. But the major change came 11 months later. The events of September 11 2001 changed the strategic environment, and the budget cuts of the 1990s were reversed for the rest of the decade. A single morning had put paid to any doubts concerning the threats to the United States, and concerns about regional conflict, China included, were overshadowed by the perception of a looming terrorist threat.

The capstone strategic document of this period, *Sea Power 21,* was obviously influenced by 9/11, as it indeed acknowledges (United States Navy 2002).

As with the 1990s, the Navy never lost sight of the blue water dimension, which remained the most important. However it re-emphasised littoral operations, which, together with the contemporary force structure plans, represents perhaps the height of littoral planning in the post-Cold War period. This burst of interest was rather short-lived. Towards the middle of the decade the Navy started looking beyond the conflicts of the war on terror, turning its gaze towards China and traditional blue water concerns (O'Rourke 2005, 3).

SEA POWER 21

Sea Power 21 was published in October 2002, almost a year to the day of the invasion of Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom. It was a strategic vision intended to "realize the opportunities [of the 21st century] and navigate the challenges ahead",

and it was heavily influenced by the terrorist attacks the previous year (United States Navy 2002). The threat of terrorism in general is apparent throughout the document, but the increasing tension across the Taiwan Strait, especially after the election of the first pro-independent Taiwanese president and the collision between a US and Chinese aircraft off the coast of China, was not forgotten. Both of these issues came at a time of increasing defence spending in the United States.

Comparing this strategy to *Anytime, Anywhere* and the other strategic documents of the 1990s, it is obvious that they differ quite significantly in many ways. One of the most apparent changes is the perception of threats. The lack of specificity that characterised the 1990s was replaced by a relative level of certainty. The primary sources of the 21st century's threats were stated to be "nations poised for conflict in key regions, widely dispersed and well-funded terrorist and criminal organizations, and failed states that deliver only despair to their people", although no specific actors were mentioned. The focus on conventional, regional conflicts had thus been expanded to encompass issues that were not traditionally military in nature, representing, in Geoffrey Till's terms, a step in the post-modern direction (Till 2009). More specifically, it was stated in *Sea Power 21* that:

> threats will be varied and deadly, including weapons of mass destruction, conventional warfare, and widespread terrorism. Future enemies will attempt to deny us access to critical areas of the world, threaten vital friends and interests overseas, and even try to conduct further attacks against the American homeland.

These threats figured prominently throughout the document. The authors referred to conventional warfare in the form of amphibious operations and sea control: "Sea Shield [a defensive US Navy concept] will protect our national interests with layered global defensive power based on *control of the seas* [italics added by author], forward presence, and networked intelligence." (United States Navy 2002) The attention devoted to maritime domain awareness, intercepting suspicious vessels and high-tech

vessel inspection technology confirms the new emphasis on anti-terror in the US Navy. Although not explicitly mentioned, the strategy clearly targets the connections between terrorism, attacks against the American homeland and weapons of mass destruction (WMD), as well as conventional forms of smuggling. In fact, these issues received as much attention as nuclear deterrence and ballistic missile defence together. Furthermore, the vastness of the oceans makes it hard to detect terrorists and criminal activities and terrorists possess limited means to operate on the open ocean, meaning that these operations would have be conducted primarily in the littorals, preferably as far away from the US as possible, but if necessary in US territorial waters.

And here the impact of 9/11 is obvious: "[t]he events of 11 September 2001 tragically illustrated that the promise of peace and security in the new century is fraught with profound dangers". This concern with attacks on the American homeland is a new feature of post-Cold War strategies. Former strategies were concerned with influencing events abroad, and did not consider the possibility of having to defend the US directly. This new awareness did not warrant a change in geographic priorities, however. Following in the footsteps of the strategies of the 1990s, *Sea Power 21* did not specify a particular region or regions as areas of special interest but was seemingly content with locating where the dangers of the new century were to be found, i.e. in "nations poised for conflict in key regions, widely dispersed and well-funded terrorist and criminal organizations, and failed states that deliver only despair to their people." At first sight, this seems rather vague, but it did limit the areas of interest somewhat, as the above "definition" more or less excluded Western Europe, while the Western Pacific, the Middle East, Africa and pretty much any hotspot in the world would be included.

Seen as a whole, *Sea Power 21* did not represent a definite change in the geographic priorities of the US Navy. There were other tangible signs, however, of Europe's declining importance. One of the reasons for Europe's dwindling significance was the division of the Atlantic as a unified theatre of war. While the

whole Atlantic had constituted a single geographic command which, in practice, was basically preoccupied with Europe, by 2002 it was divided into three geographic commands: Northern Command, responsible for North America; Southern Command, responsible for South America; and European Command. What is more, the Mediterranean ceased to be a hub for a combat credible forward presence, a move that basically stripped it of many of the warships that were stationed there and transferred them to other areas. The *Global Defense Posture Review*, conducted by the Department of Defense between 2002 and 2004, mandated an increase in the Pacific forces at the expense of the European theatre. The declining importance of Europe is in line with the previous strategic documents, as is the vagueness: on the latter point, the strategy continues the post–Cold War trend.

The strike capability of the US Navy had proved to be an important and very effective contribution in bringing down the Taliban government of Afghanistan, and it had also been used in the bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999. Also, at the time, the major buzzword in the US Department of Defense was transformation, with Secretary Donald Rumsfeld as its foremost proponent. Transformation was supposed to continuously change the US military by taking advantage of new technologies and concepts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the armed forces. The network-centric warfare concept is a perfect example of this. This was not lost on the authors of *Sea Power 21*, who insisted on taking advantage of US superiority in this field to confront enemies "far seaward, taking advantage of the time and space afforded by naval forces to shield our nation from impending threats." (United States Navy 2002) One can object to this by saying that both the Afghanistan and Serbian campaigns were conducted ashore, while the Navy operates in the maritime environment. But this would overlook a crucial point: that the lessons could be applied to the maritime environment, and perhaps especially the littorals, where the US Navy and the Marine Corps could exploit the advantages of the network-centric warfare concept against technologically inferior enemies.

At this point, there were several indications that the littorals were gaining importance in the US Navy. Conventional sea control operations were considered to be paramount, although primarily as enablers for power projection ashore: "Achieving battle-space superiority in forward theaters is central [...] especially as enemy area-denial efforts become more capable." (United States Navy 2002). This suggests that the US Navy was not expecting conventional threats close to the US or on the high seas. Combined with the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) and new destroyer projects, both intended for littoral operations, it is natural to assume that the primary conventional threat was in the littorals.

This is very much a continuation of the sea control aspect of *Anytime, Anywhere*, although it did not receive the level of attention it had done in the 1997 publication. As was previously noted, sea control in the littorals was primarily seen as an enabler for power projection ashore, and the importance of littoral operations is obvious for two reasons. The US Navy had been planning a littoral destroyer since the early 1990s, but the first tangible project was the Streetfighter concept, which was launched in 1999. The Streetfighter project never materialised, however, and was replaced by the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) programme in 2001. Although a littoral combatant was mentioned in *Anytime, Anywhere*, the LCS was one of the first concrete measures to be mentioned in strategic documents. The mere reference to the Littoral Combat Ship project in the strategy indicates that littoral operations were considered both highly relevant and important. Furthermore, *Sea Power 21* represented an affirmation of the close relationship between the Navy and the Marine Corps. The *Sea Basing* section discussed the Navy-Marine Corps advantages in projecting power by, among other things, replacing on-shore bases with prepositioned equipment off-shore. The rationale was that, with proliferation of WMDs and declining availability of overseas bases, "it is compelling both militarily and politically to reduce the vulnerability of US forces through expanded use of secure, mobile, networked sea bases." The implication of this was that the US Navy had to have the capability to command the littorals, or else there would be no power

projection ashore. During the 1990s, there was a similar, although somewhat varying focus on littoral operations and *Sea Power 21* continues this line in striking a balance between blue water and littoral considerations.

The Navy's budget in 2002 was $125 billion, up from $121 billion the year before, and by 2005, the budget amounted to $152 billion. Also, for the first, and only, time in the post-Cold War period, the number of personnel also increased this year, from 378,000 in 2001 to 383,000 in 2002. The added resources were reflected in the new force goal from 2002, set at 375 ships, a clear increase from the previous force goal of 305. As a consequence, the shipbuilding plans underwent some major developments, perhaps the most interesting of which is the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) programme, launched in November 2001. As Ronald O'Rourke states in his December 2004 report to Congress: "The primary intended missions of the LCS are countering enemy mines, submarines, and fast attack craft (sometimes called 'swarm boats') in heavily contested littoral (near-shore) waters." (O'Rourke 2004, 1). The Navy wanted to build between 30 and 60 hulls, amounting all told to between $7.5 billion and $15 billion, depending on the number of hulls (O'Rourke 2004, 2). The planned investment in LCS was quite substantial, although in comparison, the first two ships of the new littoral destroyer class would cost about $3 billion per ship (O'Rourke 2010, 4, 12). Considering the scale of the destroyer programmes, the planned LCS investment was modest no matter how many ships were procured; however, it would still increase the littoral capabilities of the US Navy significantly. The second development was that of the new destroyer. Originating in the 1990s, when the programme was designated DD-21, the Navy first envisaged 32 ships. This was reduced to between 16 and 24 ships in 2001 when the programme was officially announced and designated as a littoral combatant, and further reduced to between eight and 12 in 2005. By 2006, the number was down to seven (O'Rourke 2006, 7). The third development was the initiation of the new cruiser programme on November 1, 2001, a ship that was planned to replace the Ticonderoga class of cruisers, and thus falling into the blue water category of ships.[8] (The new cruiser would have an emphasis on air defence and ballistic missile defence.) This increase in shipbuilding plans, and their distinctly littoral orientation, in the early part of this decade can be seen in connection with the increase in defence budgets that came after the events of 9/11. The background for the cuts in the destroyer programme around 2005/2006 is difficult to determine. However, it is natural to assume that the rising power of China and the certain prospects of a change in defence policy beyond the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan were two factors.

GREAT POWER RIVALRY AND CHINA

The truncation of the destroyer programme came at a time when the US security policy establishment was tentatively moving beyond the immediate needs of the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Navy was no exception in this development, and looking to the future, the Navy started changing its strategic approach. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, aggression by regional powers, and especially China, was claiming the top spot in Navy planning. The US was forced to recognise that the world was moving from a uni-polar to a bi- or multi-polar power structure faster than many experts had predicted, and US economic problems in the form of a tremendous budget deficit, and an even bigger debt, had made it clear that major changes were in store for the entire Department of Defense.

As for the Navy, the last half of the decade was a period of adaptation to this situation. Although still tending to littoral warfare and irregular operations, an expanding and more assertive China held its attention. This led to increased emphasis on traditional blue water operations, accompanied by a geographic focus on the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean at the expense of the European orientation. Besides terrorism and emerging powers, a number of other issues, not traditionally associated with navies, gained urgency. Piracy, for instance, became a

major concern of the US Navy, as did humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, while the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq seemed to have provided new understanding of the complexities of conflicts. However, by 2010, with the Afghan and Iraqi conflicts in mind, the US appetite for military intervention abroad had lessened. Despite all the talk about piracy and unconventional conflicts, attention was increasingly directed at the potential for great power rivalry in the Pacific, as well as the challenges of North Korea and Iran. Furthermore, as a reaction to the largely unilateral path chosen earlier in the Bush presidency, and the realisation of the limits on US Naval power, the Navy placed a heavy emphasis on multilateral cooperation, as well as joint operations with the other armed services, the new mantra being *partnerships*. This was the basis of what Chief Naval Operations Admiral Mike Mullen in October 2006 termed the "1000 Ship Navy", a partnership between maritime nations to improve maritime security.

COOPERATIVE STRATEGY FOR 21ST CENTURY SEAPOWER

This new focus was apparent in the US Navy's *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* (CS 21), published just over six years after the events of 9/11, although it had been renamed the *Global Maritime Partnership* in order to appear more inclusive to other nations.[9] None of the post-Cold War strategic documents had claimed to be actual strategies; rather they were billed as strategic concepts, visions or the "way ahead". With *CS 21*, the US Navy had an *official strategy* for the first time since the *Maritime Strategy* was published in 1986. Published towards the end of the second presidential term of George W. Bush, the authors wished to influence both the current and next administration, and to demonstrate that the "Navy was in vanguard [sic] of needed national security concept changes." (Swartz 2010, 1254).

In the years since *Sea Power 21* was published, the US had invaded Iraq. Despite overwhelming initial success, this venture proved to be much more difficult than the US political leadership expected. By 2007 the security in Iraq had deteriorated, with dif-

ferent ethnic groups engaged in an insurgency that was akin to a civil war. The war on terror reached a temporary peak at this point in time, with the surge of extra US troops to Iraq and the adoption of new counterinsurgency tactics in order to deal with the rising levels of violence (Lundesgaard 2009; Kronvall 2007). Concurrently, the campaign in Afghanistan was also running into difficulties. Together with the Iraq conflict and the war on terror in general, these campaigns had been the natural focal points of the US military. Maritime issues like sea control, power projection and littoral operations were no longer at the forefront of events as they had been during the 1990s. The relief effort following the 2004 tsunami in South-East Asia saw extensive naval contributions by, among others, the US Navy, while pirate activity, climate change and the problem of failed states gained more urgency. The events and conflicts of this decade clearly influenced the new strategy. Their complexity was recognised by the authors of several US military publications, perhaps especially by those of the new counterinsurgency manual published jointly by the Marine Corps and the Army. This approach was also evident in *CS 21*, which represented a major step away from the Mahanian approach to sea power that was advocated in the *Maritime Strategy*, embracing a comprehensive approach to maritime security very much akin to Geoffrey Till's concept of a post-modern navy. In an article referring specifically to the strategy, Geoffrey Till finds *CS 21* to be "much more comprehensive in its approach [than previous Navy documents] and seems much more aware of the implications and consequences of the broader [...] concepts of security" (Till 2008, 28).

Taking this comprehensive approach, the authors of *CS 21* expanded the list of threats. "Major power war, regional conflict, terrorism, lawlessness and natural disasters—all have the potential to threaten US national security and world prosperity." (United States Navy 2007) Major power war and regional conflict were the the US Navy's raisons d'être. During the 1990s, regional instability was considered the major challenge, but with *CS 21* major power war became, for the first time since the Cold War, an important issue. But *CS 21* also pursued and ex-

panded on issues that are not considered to be traditional naval issues. "While defending our homeland and defeating adversaries in war remain the indisputable ends of seapower, it must be applied more broadly if it is to serve the national interest." Under the heading "challenges of the new era", a range of issues beyond traditional naval tasks were addressed, including the effects of climate change, technology, poverty, religious extremism, weak and corrupt governments among others. All could cause traditional and non-traditional conflicts as well as crime. What is genuinely new here is how the Navy intended to solve these issues. In *The Way Ahead*, the Navy's role was to combat the threats resulting from these issues, a way of treating the symptoms and not the cause of the threat. In *CS 21*, the actual cause of the conflict, be it poverty, ideology, interstate rivalry or something else, was introduced as a challenge on the grounds of its potential to produce threats. This new approach is a cornerstone of the document with the authors affirming that "[w]e believe that preventing wars is as important as winning wars." (United States Navy 2007). Geoffrey Till has pointed out that the prevention of war was "less than novel given the great stress on deterrence in the Cold War era, which was after all about *preventing* war." What is new is how deterrence was defined in the strategy:

> what does seem to be different is the much wider conception of what deterrence actually means and actually requires these days. The coercive approach of demonstrating denial capabilities against, or promising punishment for, prospective wrongdoers has been absorbed into a much wider concept of working against the social, environmental, and economic conditions that make wrongdoing more likely (Till 2008, 27-28).

The new concept of deterrence was designed to prevent threats from arising, and when they occurred, they would be met by the naval services before they reached US shores. There was no mention of specific state actors posing, or likely to pose, a threat or challenge. Nevertheless, certain priorities made in the document indicated causes for concern. Conventional actors falling into this category are most

likely North Korea, China and Iran. This observation is based on the authors' intention of having credible combat power "continuously postured in the Western Pacific and the Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean to protect our vital interests, assure our friends and allies of our continuing commitment to regional security, and deter and dissuade potential adversaries and peer competitors" (United States Navy 2007). This touches upon the geographic priorities of the US Navy.

With regard to unconventional threats, the strategy does not mention specific actors, something one wouldn't expect anyway due to the innumerable terrorist and criminal organisations and their elusive nature. It does provide a range of different categories of actors, and it is clear from reading *CS 21* that the perception of threat has changed significantly since the previous strategic publications. The US Navy was primarily concerned with conventional threats in the 1990s, with unconventional threats limited in *Sea Power 21* to terrorism. In *CS 21* the unconventional actors were grouped under the term transnational threats, which referred to "terrorists and extremists; proliferators of weapons of mass destruction; pirates; traffickers in persons, drugs, and conventional weapons; and other criminals." (United States Navy 2007) The list of threats had expanded since *Sea Power 21* was published, a natural consequence of the comprehensive approach that was taken to the strategy and a result of the post 9/11 security environment that was described above.

The absence of an explicit reference to an adversary or adversaries, or levels of threat, has attracted some criticism, and as William T. Pendley puts it: "It is not adequate merely to catalogue threats, which is what this new maritime strategy does. To be relevant, it must prioritize the threats in terms of both their timing and danger to American national interests." (Pendley 2008) He continues by emphasising the primacy of the threat posed by radical Islamic terrorists, followed by the possibility of conflict on the Korean peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait . Others that have been involved in the process, such as, Robert C. Rubel, contend:

> In developing the strategy, we realized that one of the real dangers, especially with regard to emerging powers, is that considering them hostile for planning purposes could be self-fulfilling.

He contrasts *CS 21*'s "'opportunity based' planning" (positioning the maritime services to take positive actions to prevent war, protect the global system, and create a better peace), with threat and capability based planning (Rubel 2008). Capability based planning, which replaced threat based planning in the 1990s, uses scenarios in military planning, and the force structure and plans are based on these. Notwithstanding any debate about the (lack of) threat assessments in *CS 21*, compared to previous strategy publications there are several significant differences.

The geographical priorities of the US Navy have been touched upon quite briefly, but they had obviously changed quite significantly since the publication of *Sea Power 21*. Looking beyond Iraq and Afghanistan, the plan set out by the authors to focus combat forces in the Western Pacific and Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean signalled a reorientation of the geographical priorities of the US Navy, a natural development considering the security environment outlined above and particularly interesting seen in light of the mentioning of major power war. Taking the US diplomatic relations and the general security situation in these areas into account, the US Navy is clearly, if implicitly, referring to China, North Korea and Iran. In addition, *CS 21* "recognizes the rising importance and need for increased peacetime activities in Africa and the Western Hemisphere", and also refers to the Arctic as an area with a potential for conflict as the ice recedes (United States Navy 2007). An interesting observation is that the only areas that did *not* receive any mention were Europe and Oceania, the former being the main focus of the US Navy for half a century. This shift in priorities was not just cosmetic. It was very much a real shift, insofar as the basing structure and home basing of US Navy ships changed as well. In 2007, and for the first time in 60 years, there were more ships based in the Pacific than the Atlantic, and several major US Navy bases in Europe were closed in the period around the publication of *CS 21*. The shift to the Pacific was mandated in the Global Defence Posture Review from 2004 and the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report, both of which opened up for a rebasing of naval assets (Swartz 2010). Although not explicitly mentioned in *CS 21*, Europe was clearly not priority number one for US naval forces. It was stated that US naval forces in Europe would "remain among the best in the world and will enable rapid movement of forces into, through, and from Europe", but "be supported by a leaner command structure." In the Asia-Pacific the US would improve "regional military forces, such as the forward deployment of additional expeditionary maritime capabilities" (United States Department of Defense 2004, 11–12). This process of rebasing is projected to leave 58 per cent of the ships based in the Pacific, with the remainder based in the Atlantic (O'Rourke 2010, 49). This shows that *CS 21* reflected the actual geographic priorities of the Navy. The changes in force structure predated the change in the strategic publications, and by implication, a substantial change in strategy occurred before the strategy was written.

With so many new priorities, the focus on littoral operations disappeared from the document. This must not be confused with a reduction in the perceived importance of the littorals, however. First of all, blue water operations were not mentioned either. Second, the focus on peace time operations and the prevention of conflict did not invite a discussion of the most likely operating environments. Hence, after 16 years of operational focus the US Navy produced a strategy that once again focused on the strategic challenges. Again, this did not mean that the littorals lost all importance. Indeed, a careful reading of the document shows a continuing emphasis on these areas. One of the main tenets of *CS 21* was the importance of the maritime domain, and especially the coastal areas:

> Over the past four decades, total sea borne trade has more than quadrupled: 90% of world trade and two-thirds of its petroleum are transported by sea. The sea-lanes and supporting shore infrastructure are the lifelines of the modern global economy, visible and vulnerable symbols of the modern distribution system that relies on free

transit through increasingly urbanized littoral regions (United States Navy 2007).

To uphold this free transit, the US Navy would have to operate in the littorals together with its partners in the proposed Global Maritime Partnership. The basic premise for this partnership was that the US Navy would not be able to secure this access by itself, and depended on contributions by other maritime nations. Unless the intention was to hand this kind of constabulary task over to the partners, the US Navy would be forced to operate in the littorals, and going by the statements in *CS 21*, this was indeed the plan. "[US] security and prosperity are inextricably linked with those of others, US maritime forces will be deployed to protect and sustain the peaceful global system comprised of interdependent networks of trade, finance, information, law, people and governance." (United States Navy 2007) Abdicating this kind of responsibility would create a dependency on partners and a "hole" in US Navy capabilities, which would become very apparent were a conflict of interest to arise between the US and partner countries on these issues. At the same time, Navy capabilities in conventional, blue water, conflicts were ultimately considered the most important. As pointed out above, "defending our homeland and defeating adversaries in war remain the indisputable ends of Seapower" (United States Navy 2007). Thus, this strategy continued the priorities of the earlier strategies by striking a balance between conventional blue water capabilities on the one side and littoral capabilities on the other, with an emphasis on the primacy of the former.

There is nevertheless a difference between strategy and reality. The challenges referred to in *CS 21* implicitly refer to the extent of the littoral orientation of the Navy in that they all, with the exception of China, are located in the littorals. This did not render littoral capabilities untouchable, however. In an environment of budget cuts and numerous challenges, priority is given to the greatest challenge; by 2010, this challenge was clearly identified.

There was no let up in the downsizing of the US Navy after the turn of the century, despite rising budgets. But it had slowed to a steady trickle by the early 2000s, and the rising cost of military equipment probably contributed strongly to this development. The nature of these developments was much the same as those of the 1990s, which produced a scaled down version of the Cold War fleet, but with individually more capable ships. A few developments deserve special mention. Towards the end of the period, on November 8, 2008, the first of a total of 55 Littoral Combat Ships was commissioned. The LCS programme, which was launched on November 1, 2001, the commissioning of the first ship in November 2008, and the continuing plan to procure a total of 55 ships show how serious the US Navy was about operating in the littorals. The shipbuilding plans of 2001, more specifically the LCS, the new classes of cruisers and destroyers, continued through to the publication of *CS 21*, although the destroyer programme had again been reduced and was planned to consist of only seven hulls.

And this is where the littoral capabilities were losing out. By 2010, the Navy stopped the production of its new destroyer, with only three ships produced. The Navy decided instead to resume the 1990s Burke class destroyer programme in 2008–2009, because the new class emphasised "land-attack operations and operating in littoral waters". The decision to abort this program was partly based on the growing concern about Chinese anti-access capabilities. Another contributing factor were the clear signals from Congress of defence budget cuts towards the end of the decade. The US economy had not been doing well at the time and had accumulated a large deficit. The situation continued to deteriorate after the 2008 financial crisis, and the new destroyer programme was of the expensive sort. In another major development, the Navy cancelled the new cruiser programme in its entirety in 2010 and replaced it with an upgraded version of the Burke class destroyer on grounds of unaffordability.

From around 2005, the Global War on Terror's grip on the US Navy started to slip, and the littoral surge of the first half of the decade also started losing momentum. The first sign was the implicit references to China, Iran and North Korea in the *Cooperative*

Strategy for 21st Century Seapower, but the trend continued to the end of the decade with the US Navy increasingly emphasising blue water platforms, the Littoral Combat Ship being the exception. At the time of writing, in 2011, peer competitors and con-

ventional blue water operations are the primary concern, and given the current security and economic situation, which remains relatively unchanged, this is likely to continue into the second decade of the 20th century.

SHIP CATEGORY	FY1999	FY2004	FY2009	% CUT/INCREASE
Strategic Submarines	18	14	14	-22 %
Cruise missile Submarines	0	4	4	
Nuclear fuelled attack submarines	57	53	53	-7 %
Attack submarines	0	0	0	
Aircraft Carriers	12	12	11	-8 %
Battleship	0	0	0	
Cruiser	27	25	22	-19 %
Destroyer	52	48	57	10 %
Frigate	37	30	30	-19 %
LCS	0	0	1	
Patrol craft	0	0	0	
Mine warfare	16	16	14	-13 %
Amphibious	41	37	33	-20 %
Other	57	52	46	-19 %
Total	317	291	285	-10 %

TABLE 2: This table shows the total number of ships in the Battle Force of the US Navy and the percentage cut or increase between 1999 and 2009. For more information on ship classes, see table 1.

CONCLUSION

As the Cold War ended, the 1990s presented the US Navy with a radically new security situation as well as substantial budgets cuts. Everything from strategy to doctrine and force structure was configured to tackle a conflict with the Soviet Union along Mahanian lines. The US Navy struggled to come to terms with its role in this new system, which resulted in a balancing act between the requirements for blue water operations on the one side, and the new requirements for littoral combat on the other. A major issue was defining what actually justified the US Navy, because there were no clearly discernable threats on which planning could be structured. Apart from vague references to regional conflicts, primarily

occurring outside the Atlantic region, there were no clearly defined strategic challenges and threats. The US Navy therefore turned to operational challenges associated with projecting power in the world's littorals. Blue water operations were still seen as the primary task of US Navy, something the strategic documents throughout the period repeatedly made clear. It would be natural to see this blue water fascination as a deeply rooted part of US strategic culture. Indeed, as Roger W. Barnett remarks, *The Maritime Strategy* of 1986 "is striking not for its unique approach but for its broad, long-term continuity with Navy thinking and for its reflection of Navy Strategic Culture." (Barnett 2009, 97) But without a blue

water adversary and faced with the uncertainty of the post-Cold War environment, the US Navy was forced to divert some of its attention to what were considered to be more pressing issues. A new range of littoral capable ships was being planned, although these plans had not been translated into actual shipbuilding programmes yet, and ships primarily aimed at blue water operations received weapons and sensors adapted to littoral operations. Thus, there was tension between what the strategies claimed to be the main operating environment in the new security environment, and the perceived need to be ready for blue water operations. The solution to this fumbling in the dark was to use the blue water force structure from the Cold War to operate in the littorals in order to influence events ashore. The new force structure was much slimmer than the Cold War fleet, but the construction of new ships, and the introduction of new technologies, meant that each individual ship was more capable than its predecessor, both for littoral and blue water operations. Thus, by the end of the 1990s, the advocates of the blue water school had gained the upper hand.

In contrast to the 1990s, the first strategic document that was published after the turn of the century was more concrete in its threat assessments, and also relatively littoral-minded. Heavily influenced by the ongoing Global War on Terror, terrorism and smuggling became the centrepiece of the US Navy's *Sea Power 21*, and, taking the shipbuilding plans into account, it was also the heyday of the littoral school, with concrete plans for two new classes of littoral capable ships. The grip that the War on Terror held on planning was to be short-lived, however. By the middle of the decade there were signs that the Navy was looking beyond the Iraqi and Afghan conflicts, turning its attention to rising regional powers instead.

Taking these issues seriously, the authors behind *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, which at the time of writing is the last strategic publication from the US Navy, took the unconventional approach even further than *Sea Power 21* in adopting a comprehensive approach to its expanded definition of maritime security. Also, the previous emphasis on the operational challenges connected to access to the littorals disappeared in *CS 21*, but the focus on the economic importance of the coastal areas and the importance of securing the freedom of navigation in these areas confirmed the position of littoral operations. The Littoral Combat Ship programme underscores this further, in that the US Navy commissioned the first of this new class of ships in 2008 and had plans to procure 55 hulls in total. Despite this, conventional blue water operations were considered to be the ultimate end of sea power, and in *CS 21*, the priority of combat credible forces in the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean/Arabian Gulf, as well as the mention of great power conflict, points to China's potential as a peer competitor and conventional opponent at sea. The force structure also confirmed this. The US Navy was planning for a majority of blue water platforms, with the LCS as the only major littoral programme, and the Pacific now received priority of the combat ready forces.

The first decade of the 21st century is over, and we will probably see more changes in Navy strategy in the next few years. Developments in the Western Pacific, the rise of China specifically, have gained renewed urgency since the publication of *CS 21*. Another factor of possible concern to the US Navy is the ongoing challenge presented by North Korea, made even more urgent by the discovery of a new nuclear powered reactor and the shelling of a South Korean island in November 2010. The pressing issues in Asia are likely to demand increasing attention in the coming years and will influence future strategy documents and emphasise the capability to engage and win in regular combat.

ENDNOTES

1 According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, a good strategy would have the following makeup:

(1) purpose, scope, and methodology; (2) problem definition and risk assessment; (3) goals, subordinate objectives, activities, and performance measures; (4) resources, investments, and risk management; (5) organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination; and (6) integration and implementation.(General Accounting Office 2004, 4)

None of the documents in this period contain all of these characteristics, and this article will not judge them explicitly by these criteria. They are important for students of strategy as an analytical toolbox.

Below the strategic level of war, connecting the strategic level with the tactical level of war, are operations, and the operational level of war. The operational level is used to exploit tactical events and give them strategic meaning, and often take the form of a campaign, tying several tactical engagements either sequential or simultaneous to produce strategic effect. For more on the operational level of war, see Milan Vego's article, Major Naval Operations, or his book *Operational Warfare at Sea* (2008, 2009).

2 I shall not be including the strategic submarines in my discussion of the force structure discussion on the grounds that they are largely separate from the strategic planning of the US Navy. Bringing in nuclear deterrence would also introduce a range of theories, international agreements, conventions and other considerations that fall outside the scope of this article.

3 For more on the development of the Base Force, see (Jaffe 1993).

4 The US Military defines the littorals as comprising "two segments of battlespace: 1. Seaward: the area from the open ocean to the shore, which must be controlled to support operations ashore. 2. Landward: the area inland from the shore that can be supported and defended directly from the sea." (United States Department of Defense 2010)

5 All budget figures are in fiscal year 2009 dollars.

6 In the US Navy, the primary role of the destroyer is to be a so called multi-mission platform, able to engage targets in the air, on the surface and underwater, with an emphasis on air defence and ballistic missile defence. The new destroyer class was intended to emphasise land attack capabilities to support operations on land, making up for the loss of such capabilities when the battleships were decommissioned.

7 There are several classes of amphibious ships, descriptions of which are available on these pages:

http://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact_display.asp?cid=4200&tid=400&ct=4

http://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact_display.asp?cid=4200&tid=500&ct=4

http://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact_display.asp?cid=4200&tid=600&ct=4

http://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact_display.asp?cid=4200&tid=1000&ct=4

8 Its primary missions would be anti air warfare and ballistic missile defence (O'Rourke 2010, 1).

9 The 1000 Ship Navy concept was basically an international coalition of maritime powers whose aim was to protect the freedom of navigation in international waters. However, its title inevitably created connotations to the (exclusively US) 600 ship Navy proposed by Navy Secretary Lehman during the 1980s. To many of the prospective international partners this implied a high degree of US control of other navies and they were therefore sceptical of it.

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