

# IMPLICATIONS OF THE TRI-SERVICE MARITIME STRATEGY FOR AMERICA'S NAVAL SERVICES

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On December 17, 2020 the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard (naval services) issued a new Tri-Service Maritime Strategy (TSMS).<sup>1</sup> Entitled “Advantage at Sea,”<sup>2</sup> the TSMS represents a significant update to modern U.S. maritime defense and security thinking, in large part, in recognition of the growing effect strategic competition, specifically with respect to China, will play in the coming years.

The TSMS identifies three phases — day-to-day competition, conflict, and crisis — and calls for greater integration amongst the naval services to prevail across every phase.<sup>3</sup> With respect to the Coast Guard, it includes specific recognition of the service’s unique authorities and capabilities as an important aspect of the defense enterprise, critical in the day-to-day competition phase to avoid further escalation into conflict and crisis. But important enterprise, departmental, and congressional considerations remain for the Coast Guard, especially regarding ensuring the close integration the TSMS calls for. For the Marine Corps, the intent is to demonstrate credible deterrence in the western Pacific by distributing lethal, survivable, and sustainable expeditionary sea-denial anti-ship units in the littorals in support of fleet and joint operations. And finally, the Navy finds itself as the ship-to-shore connector for the TSMS, with responsibility for knitting together the three naval services in new operating concepts and frameworks for cooperation while simultaneously confronting critical external threats and looming internal challenges.

## COAST GUARD

The updated Tri-Service Maritime Strategy might be the most important enterprise-level policy document for the Coast Guard of the last 30 years. At its core, the strategy does two key things. First, it acknowledges the idea that the heads of the naval services collectively believe that to prevail in strategic competition in the maritime domain, the United States must be able to outmatch our adversaries not just in terms of lethality, but in our ability to effectively operate below the threshold of conflict. Doing so is a critical component of national defense in and of itself and has the benefit of helping to create the operating and theater conditions that increase

the potential for success if it becomes necessary to engage in armed conflict. In other words, while the strategy is replete with strong language calling for increased lethality and more flexibly deployed hard power punch, it also importantly acknowledges that sea power means more than strike<sup>4</sup> and sea control<sup>5</sup> and that successfully navigating the entire competition continuum in the maritime furthers U.S. national defense as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

This opens the door for (long necessary) increased attention to issues like maritime security capacity building with like-minded partner nations and allies, most (but not all)<sup>7</sup> of whom are not particularly interested in U.S. Navy-like force projection,

but are instead concerned about being able to effectively govern and protect their own maritime borders.<sup>8</sup> Thus, assisting our partners develop the authorities, capabilities, and capacity to execute their own maritime constabulary functions like exclusive economic zone enforcement, contraband interdiction, migrant operations, and countering illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing<sup>9</sup> must be part of a holistic maritime national defense posture because our rivals are using all measures short of war to advance their strategic goals; none more so than China.<sup>10</sup> The TSMS clearly states that helping partner and allied nations so that they can better address these challenges, but especially when the challenges are posed by strategic rivals to the United States like China and Russia, is a critically important tile in the mosaic of modern sea power.

Of nearly equal import, the strategy also (albeit slightly) acknowledges that the Arctic is an increasingly important competition domain and that an overt, persistent presence<sup>11</sup> in the high latitudes advances our national security interests, consistent with both the Department of Defense (DOD) services (Navy<sup>12</sup> and Air Force<sup>13</sup>) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)'s<sup>14</sup> recently updated Arctic strategy documents.

These equities — the imperative to team with partner nations and the growing and long past due acknowledgment of the Arctic (and, although not mentioned in the strategy, likely even the Antarctic) in the expanding field of strategic competition — directly implicate the core competencies of an increasingly global U.S. Coast Guard. Including them in the TSMS inextricably links the Coast Guard to its DOD-based naval services partners. The importance of this linkage for the Coast Guard in what will foreseeably be a more competitive budget environment cannot be overstated.<sup>15</sup>

Second, the strategy calls for increased integration<sup>16</sup> and interoperability between the naval services. This means operational integration; education, training, and performance improvement integration; and procurement integration. Perhaps most importantly though, it means cultural integration, the full extent

of which has been wickedly elusive to the U.S. armed forces.<sup>17</sup> Total naval services cultural integration, aspirationally marked by truly seamless jointness, would greatly benefit not just the nation, but the Coast Guard particularly, which sometimes finds itself on the outside looking in with respect to major DOD muscle movements, including budget plus ups,<sup>18</sup> discussions regarding fleet sizes,<sup>19</sup> personnel management/benefits, and even important “all hands” guidance from senior U.S. military leadership.<sup>20</sup>

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There has already been lots of coverage regarding the Coast Guard's tactical and operational role in the Tri-Service Maritime Strategy.<sup>21</sup> This brief will not rehash that, but will instead call attention to some higher-level actions that will also help execute the strategy. As a start, the Biden administration should seriously consider taking the necessary steps to add the commandant of the Coast Guard as a full voting member to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>22</sup> Doing so would require a statutory change, but if executing Coast Guard-like functions are truly going to be part of the sea power projection equation, this change is long past due.<sup>23</sup>

Further, the administration should charter a study as to whether the DHS is still the best organizational model to meet the threats of the world today. This would necessary include an assessment of whether nesting the Coast Guard in DHS still makes the most sense, given the current geopolitical environment marked by strategic competition with so-called “great power” rivals. Analyzing the pros<sup>24</sup> and cons<sup>25</sup> for shifting the Coast Guard out of DHS into DOD is relatively well-trod ground, but given China's increasingly militarized Coast Guard,<sup>26</sup> such a shift, either temporarily or permanently, may prove inevitable in the years to come.<sup>27</sup>

First, one need not be Sun Tzu to recognize that it is almost always better to act when you have the time to do so, as opposed to being forced to a decision in a time or manner not of one's own choosing.<sup>28</sup> Second, a fresh look here may be helpful, given the field of players in 2021, especially because the creation of the U.S. Space Force establishes a new “smallest” service in the United States armed forces. The conventional wisdom has long been that the Coast Guard's small size would mean an unacceptable risk of being “gobbled up” by the DOD bureaucracy which would inevitably be less than interested in appropriately prioritizing the Coast Guard's many important non-defense missions. Yet, the Space Force apparently fully intends to scrap for every budget dollar in the DOD and if it can, there's no reason why the Coast Guard, over 230 years older than the new service, couldn't also.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, there are clear parallels between the two services beyond their relatively small sizes. The Space Force finds itself responsible to organize, train, and equip forces for what is arguably the most important operational domain to the future of both the American way of life and the American way of war, and to do so must overcome significant bureaucratic inertia<sup>30</sup> and a lack of public familiarity with its value proposition.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, the Coast Guard finds itself in the position of being able to really capitalize on the post-9/11 recognition of the overlap between homeland security, domestic policy, and national defense, especially as that overlap relates transnational issues like cybersecurity, climate security, infrastructure resilience, transnational organized crime, and most recently, pandemic response.<sup>32</sup> To do so, it must also contend with a relative lack of public recognition as compared to some of its DOD sister services as well as bureaucratic inertia grounded in traditional conceptions of what it means to provide for the national defense.

Regardless of where the Coast Guard resides — DHS or DOD or within some other construct — increased interoperability between the naval services will also require a focused and dedicated effort to

achieve similarly extraordinarily close cooperation between the relevant congressional committees, as the Coast Guard's authorizing and appropriating committees of primary jurisdiction are not the same as the DOD services.<sup>33</sup> As a start, this should mean ever-improving transparency and cooperation between the engaged committees during the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and appropriations bills drafting and approval process, as well as parallel efforts going the other way with respect to the Coast Guard Authorization Act (CGAA) and its associated appropriations bill.<sup>34</sup> If the services are taking great strides to break down stovepipes to improve interoperability, efficiency, and operational effectiveness to counter a challenge that's greater than any one service, it's fair to expect Congress to do the same.

For the first time in memory, this past year's NDAA included the CGAA.<sup>35</sup> This is a good start, and at a minimum, this trend should continue for all future CGAAs. It's become startlingly clear that the vast majority of 21st century defense challenges in the maritime demand more Coast Guard (#moreCG).<sup>36</sup> Of course more Coast Guard means more budget,<sup>37</sup> perhaps even in a greater relative proportion than what the other naval services are requesting, to help account for the missed plus up that the DOD services enjoyed under the Trump administration<sup>38</sup> and the growing recognition of the importance of Coast Guard capabilities to furthering national defense goals.<sup>39</sup> But even without such a lopsided funding plus up, the NDAA is “must pass”<sup>40</sup> annual legislation, so ensuring that the CGAA remains linked to the NDAA will also help facilitate more Coast Guard even more so than the semi-regular CGAA enactment cycle that the Coast Guard currently enjoys.

Closer legislative ties also facilitate parity between the armed forces.<sup>41</sup> Despite the positive development of the close linkage between the CGAA and the NDAA this year, the NDAA often contains provisions that either inadvertently excludes or overly include the Coast Guard through what appears as sometimes rushed or imprecise drafting from

defense committee staff. These drafting issues are most likely attributable to staff who may not be fully familiar with the nuances and dynamics of the Coast Guard's organizational relationship with the DOD or may simply be playing their cards close to the vest with early NDAA drafts, and thus bring in their Coast Guard committee counterparts too late in the process for the latter to provide meaningful input. Permanently linking the authorization acts would not only better help educate professional staff on these nuances, but will save thousands of congressional, DHS, and Coast Guard staff hours spent trying to remedy these not infrequent issues.

That said, the Coast Guard also bears some responsibility here. For its part, the service has often made great use of what can fairly be described as strategic ambiguity regarding its status in the NDAA, that has allowed it to affirmatively or tacitly opt out of some legislative requirements, (often due to administrative or cost burdens) at the expense of paying due heed to the importance of maintaining parity between the armed forces, especially as that parity relates to member benefits. When given the choice between parity and flexibility, the Coast Guard should make a conscious effort to err on the side of parity going forward. This is not to say that the service should completely abandon its posture of flexibility, but the presumption should cut towards maintaining parity as opposed to the current posture, which is presumptive flexibility. As the Coast Guard learned during the 2019 budget shutdown,<sup>42</sup> parity for parity's sake can be a righteous end in of itself. This may also mean taking a hard look at the existing statutory regime for Coast Guard personnel management that is currently largely split between Title 10 and Title 14 of the U.S. Code with an eye towards consolidation.

Keeping the CGAA linked to the NDAA also comes at relatively little cost beyond what could be perceived as a loss of control (and ability to exert influence on behalf of certain constituencies) by members and staff who currently sit on the Coast Guard's existing authorizing and appropriations committees.

Of course, a more aggressive step would be to just simply move the Coast Guard's committees of primary jurisdiction, both on the authorizations side and the appropriations side, over to their defense analogues in both the House and Senate. The Coast Guard's committees are already largely separate from the rest of DHS, which itself is subject to a byzantine labyrinth of congressional oversight that has no doubt contributed to (along with the politically charged issue of immigration enforcement) the lack of an omnibus DHS authorization act beyond the original Homeland Security Act of 2002 that first established the department.<sup>43</sup> Much like adding the commandant of the Coast Guard to the Joint Chiefs, there are reasoned, principled arguments for and against such an action that rate their own independent analysis, beyond the axiomatic resistance of congressional committees that oversee the Coast Guard to ceding that responsibility (and ability to exert influence on behalf of certain constituencies).

The key takeaway, however, is that ultimately, if we're indeed serious about fully integrating the naval services at the operational level as called for in the Tri-Service Maritime Strategy, they must be likewise fully integrated at the legislative level. There are several ways to go about this, ranging from relatively easy closer institutionalized coordination amongst relevant committee staff and members to comparatively harder major shifts in authorization and appropriation committee responsibility. But it must be done.

## **MARINE CORPS**

The TSMS highlights the growing naval power of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in a renewed great power competition, which means that the U.S. naval services can no longer presume assured sea control in a contested maritime environment vis-à-vis China. From the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) perspective, the PRC's emphasis on asymmetric warfare and operations below the level of armed conflict requires a shift in focus from conventional warfare to gray zone competition and deterrence.

General David H. Berger, the commandant of the Marine Corps, released his “planning guidance” in 2019 where he shifted the service’s focus from conventional power projection to distributed maritime operations in support of naval sea control and denial.<sup>44</sup> This shift is an “inflection point” that aligns the Marine Corps with its pacing threat as prescribed in the 2017 National Defense Strategy and is intended to repurpose and optimize the service for gray zone competition and deterrence.<sup>45</sup>

The intent of deterrence is to dissuade adversaries from conducting undesirable activities “through the threat of retaliation... or by denying the opponent’s war aims.”<sup>46</sup> Deterrence in the western Pacific requires U.S. naval forces to achieve sea control or at the very least impose sea denial against the PRC. To achieve such deterrence in coordination with the naval services, the USMC has embarked on a force design effort that would enable it to operate inside the adversary’s sensor and weapons engagement zone in support of sea control and sea denial. Combat-credible forward-presence necessitates the repurposing of specific Marine regiments into Marine littoral regiments (MLR) that operate in platoon and company-size formations strategically stationed and deployed forward to provide ground-based fire support that enables sea control and denial. To successfully do so, MLR units must demonstrate lethality, survivability, and sustainability while remaining networked to the joint force.

**Lethality** requires significant modernization and investments in mobile and rapidly deployable rocket artillery and ground-based anti-ship missiles, loitering munitions, low-cost unmanned combat aerial vehicles, and long-range unmanned surface vessels armed with autonomous artificial intelligence swarm attack drones, in addition to other advanced weapon systems.

**Survivability** requires sea and ground mobility, electronic warfare and signature management capabilities, mobile air defense and counter precision-guided munition capabilities, and expeditionary airfield capabilities.

**Sustainability** requires additional investments in unmanned aerial and ground logistics vehicles, in addition to a repurposed maritime prepositioning force (MPF) capacity aboard larger numbers of smaller and low-cost ships like the light amphibious warships, which can maneuver MLR units between island chains and sustain them.

Guided by naval service concepts such as expeditionary advanced base operations, littoral operations in a contested environment, and distributed maritime operations, distributed MLR units bring critical intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and long-range fires capabilities forward while integrated and networked closely with naval and joint forces. The intent is to deter adversary aggression, generate options and decision space for national leadership, preempt a fait accompli, and impose military and economic costs on potential adversaries. Additionally, deployed MLR units will build interoperability with allies and partners to secure access, basing, and overflight in support of distributed operations. If a conflict escalates, these forward deployed ground and sea-based naval units will set conditions for the introduction of follow-on surge capabilities.

To afford these modernizations and investments in what is expected to be a reduced military budget in the future, the Marine Corps leadership decided to divest traditional legacy capabilities that are purposely built for conventional large-formation operations ashore. Such divestments include manned anti-armor ground and aviation platforms, towed artillery and short-range mortar systems, surge-layer capacity in the reserves and the MPF, and heavier ground transportation capabilities among others. However, the success of the Marine Corps’ future force vision and force design efforts will rely heavily on congressional funding for its newly formed anti-ship units and platforms. Of note, the most recent FY2021 defense spending bill significantly cut the “USMC requested funding” for long-range precision fires, development, and more specifically ground-based anti-ship research, development, and missile procurement, despite

the Marine Corps' advertised plans to pay for such investments by divesting legacy capabilities and restructuring the force.<sup>47</sup>

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The TSMS states that the ongoing sweeping transformation of the Marine Corps will generate “a greater expeditionary combat power with enhanced capabilities for sea control and sea denial” in support of fleet and joint operations, demonstrating credible deterrence in great power competition against the PRC and Russia. However, if the current trend of congressional cuts to essential USMC investment programs continues, the Marine Corps is at risk of becoming a hollow force unable to effectively deliver on its bold vision for lethal ground-based sea denial in support of great power deterrence. Hence, the USMC must double down on its marketing efforts to better promote to Congress its vision of deterring the PRC in the western Pacific. Additionally, the naval services will have to closely coordinate efforts across all fronts, from budgeting and procurement to interoperability of units, platforms, and weapons in order to overcome these challenges and ensure the successful implementation of the TSMS.

## **NAVY**

The Coast Guard and the Marine Corps have put forth compelling new visions for how they will achieve their goals. The Navy seems to be struggling to do so, at least in a way that appears achievable. For the Navy itself, the real story in the strategy is one of foreboding, but the strategy's language is such that it largely veils a looming force structure catastrophe. In the foreword, the authors of the strategy claim that the naval services are at an inflection point, referencing the blistering

pace of China's shipbuilding and degradation of the maritime order.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps it is impolitic, or insufficiently optimistic in a strategy document, to mention that the inflection point has already passed, and we are in rapid decline. The U.S. Navy's seagoing fleet is too small to do the things being asked of it and may still get worse. Maintenance is suffering and peacetime deployment rates are unsustainable.<sup>49</sup> Programs intended to replace decommissioning ships are foundering, from the troubled Littoral Combat Ship to the three-ship white elephant Zumwalt-class.<sup>50</sup> The first ship in the new Constellation-class is not due to be delivered until FY 2026.<sup>51</sup> In the background, the Navy's 30-year shipbuilding plan calls for decommissioning 11 Ticonderoga-class cruisers by FY2026, along with 37 other ships scheduled to leave service between FY2022 and FY2026. Today's fleet is at ebb tide.<sup>52</sup>

An aggressive building plan released in December 2020 shows the Navy's path to reaching a 355-ship battle force sometime between 2031 and 2033. This strategy depends on receiving those ships. With this in mind, we must reconcile the strategy's lofty aims with years of underperformance in ship design and acquisition that has left the fleet 50 ships short of the goals set in 2007, as well as billions of dollars overbudget and years of cumulative delays.<sup>53</sup> Senior members of Congress have made their dissatisfaction clear and offered their own recommendations for righting the ship, but the outcome remains to be seen.<sup>54</sup> Much also depends on successful crewed/uncrewed teaming, for which concepts remain unproven and vessels unbuilt. These issues did not arise from the lack of an updated Tri-Service Maritime Strategy and will not be vanquished with this one's publication. For the Navy, the TSMS's success balances on the thin reed of sustained, year-on-year funding increases from Congress to build the ships required. It could be argued that these criticisms are more focused upon questions of force structure and the Navy's acquisition program than the TSMS itself. The strategy does identify the primary challenges facing the Navy and offers a series of actions intended to achieve the desired end state. However, the

Navy's future is indelibly tied to its wayward, broken processes that have crippled its development over the course of decades. This admission does not render the strategy's recommendations and vision incorrect, but it does call into question whether the strategy is achievable.

What a reader will gain from reading this document is the impression that the Navy of the future is largely the Navy that exists today, but larger. Drawing from the Chief of Naval Operations' NAVPLAN 2021, we learn that 70% of the fleet the Navy expects to have in 2030 is already in service.<sup>55</sup> The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, in form of the Ford-class, remains the fleet's centerpiece for the foreseeable future. The submarine force is emphasized, with the stated intent of delivering the Navy's new Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) on time and continuing to build Virginia-class submarines at a sustainable rate. Increased investment in long-range missile systems and delivery vehicles, and increased numbers of smaller combatants round out the future force structure. Investments in extending the carrier air wing's strike range reflect the reality of proliferation in standoff technologies like anti-ship ballistic missiles and hypersonic cruise missiles. Most of these capabilities are incremental change to existing capabilities, not revolutionary change like the advent of naval aviation. The nearest this strategy comes to something in that revolutionary vein is the incorporation of large uncrewed platforms at sea, but it is difficult to judge the concept's future from its current, nascent state.

When examining this strategy along with the Navy's long-range shipbuilding plan, certain aspects are drawn into relief. Modern naval warfare depends on long-range strike capability, and the ability to generate maritime fires. Concepts like distributed lethality, which calls for dispersed groups of ships to generate fires while complicating enemy decisionmaking, are academically sound, but only if the Navy has the hulls to execute them. The TSMS organizes itself around the threats posed by China and Russia, and today's Navy simply does not have enough platforms capable of firing missiles, or

absorbing losses, to address those threats. As the strategy notes, a smaller number of exquisite, deep-draft combatants simply will not execute the same depth and breadth of missions that will be asked of it in the course of great power competition, whether in peacetime or at war. The authors do not shy away from that fact but do couch the premise in the argument that composition of the future U.S. fleet matters more than mere numbers, which is true to a point. Although technology and operational concepts do factor into force structure, the pithy rejoinder that quantity has a quality all its own still applies. Senator Sam Nunn, once a Coast Guard petty officer himself, noted in 1979 that, "At some point, numbers do count. At some point, technology fails to offset mass."<sup>56</sup> The strategy seems to reflect that point, but also some degree of hedging against the possibility that service chiefs will not get everything they feel they need.

Prioritization of the challenges and threats emanating from China pervade this strategy, as do its component operating concepts distributed maritime operations, littoral operations in a contested environment, and expeditionary advanced base operations. There is a welcome realism here, the acknowledgement that a maritime conflict between the U.S. and China would likely play out inside the protective umbrella of the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force and Air Force, against a gargantuan, modernized Chinese naval force with far shorter supply lines. This honesty is crucial to our force, lest we fall victim to the same sort of dismissive hubris that has crippled great powers in past conflicts when facing aggressive, rising powers. The assessment of the strategic environment is spot-on. Without significant corrective action, U.S. advantages at sea will continue to erode.

Readers of this strategy might also be struck by the repeated emphasis on institutionalizing naval integration as the future of U.S. seapower. This is cause for celebration. The Navy, despite being the largest organization within the naval services, is rarely mentioned in isolation in the entire document. Repeated references to the Navy

and Coast Guard, or Navy and Marine Corps, lend to the impression that for this strategy to work, the Navy must provide the connective tissue to hold the enterprise together. Holistic thinking about seapower is critical, and this year's strategy effectively communicates increasing awareness of the complimentary roles of these three services in securing American interests at sea.

The problem with integrating these three naval services is that there are four naval services. The U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD) was not included in "A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower" in 2015 and has been excluded again in "Advantage at Sea."<sup>57</sup> Sealift merited only two mentions in the 2015 strategy, while the 2020 document made some progress in referencing the ongoing sealift recapitalization strategy and efforts to modernize the force (which include another new vessel class, the Next-Generation Logistics Ship).<sup>58</sup> Responsible for America's strategic sealift fleet, MARAD sustains naval operations around the globe and maintains the U.S. government's Ready Reserve Fleet (RRF) as well as its Military Sealift Command (MSC) surge sealift fleet. As MARAD's former Administrator Mark Buzby testified before the House Armed Services Committee in March 2020, the average age of ships in the RRF has passed 45 years and the fleet is struggling to maintain adequate readiness. The U.S. mariner workforce is likely insufficient to support an extended military contingency.<sup>59</sup> Sealift capacity is shrinking rapidly and the U.S.-flagged merchant fleet has reached historically low numbers.<sup>60</sup> All of these are part of American seapower and should be considered in concert with the Marine Corps, Navy, and Coast Guard as an equal component, rather than as an afterthought. Releasing a Quad-Service Maritime Strategy in the future would be an excellent step in that direction.

Emphasis on expanding alliances and partnerships, another theme in the strategy, requires examination in the face of shrinking numbers of U.S. Navy surface combatants. Naval partnerships vary in terms of their goals and

activities. With developed navies, the U.S. can focus on interoperability and high-end warfighting capabilities. Expanding those partnerships could take the form of cooperative deployments and increased burden-sharing, relieving some of the stress on the American fleet. With others, however, partnerships take the form of support and training, which require tasking increasingly scarce ships to participate in exercises. In some cases, the Navy already struggles to send one unarmed ship to an exercise that previously rated a small task group of combatants.<sup>61</sup> Increased use of Coast Guard forces might alleviate some of this pressure but is not a panacea. Readiness and operational commitments will almost-always trump an exercise and increasing commitment to these types of partnerships will result in unmet expectations. In the Indo-Pacific, existing commitments are taxing the fleet beyond its capacity, so it seems logical to assume that increasing commitments without either a massive increase in ships or decision to divest itself of outdated, legacy commitments in places like the Middle East will only deepen existing fissures in the foundation. The strategy's authors allude to the need for prioritization, but some priorities are not left to the service to determine. Realizing this vision for the naval services will require a number of difficult conversations about which relationships the Navy can afford to expand, and which must shrink in order to accommodate new priorities.

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Curiously, emphasis on training and education throughout the document seems to fly in the face of the short-lived Education for Seapower initiative that took only a few short breaths in the wild before being put under review, effectively killed, during former Secretary of the Navy Kenneth Braithwaite's tenure in the final year of the Trump



administration.<sup>62</sup> The Navy's first chief learning officer, John Kroger, submitted his resignation after less than a year in the position, and later penned a brutal op-ed detailing what he viewed as critical institutional failures across the Navy.<sup>63</sup> With those events in mind, it seems fair to say there are more questions than answers regarding the future of the Navy's educational programs and that the strategy largely avoids delving into the specifics of that conversation.

Finally, there is a striking lack of space dedicated to reflection on how the U.S. Navy got into the mess it is in. Yes, there are nods to poor management of acquisition, but that is not the only source of its problems. A shrinking force does not adequately explain why Navy leaders chose to continue supporting deployments that they knew would have critical impacts on ships and personnel. Navy leaders have made the excuse that the Global Force Management process is out of their hands, which is true.<sup>64</sup> However, there are avenues for dissent available to senior leaders and there is little evidence that they were used. Admittedly, this is a strategy for where the Navy is going, but how does the organization avoid the same pitfalls in the future without acknowledging where it all went wrong? By understanding and discussing the force management failures of past decades,

the Navy might take steps forward in building trust with the public and legislators that are again being asked for their trust in a system that has produced gargantuan failures, repeatedly.

The Tri-Service Maritime Strategy and the Chief of Naval Operations' NAVPLAN 2021 make one thing very clear, that the Navy wants to return its focus to sea control and power projection — “traditional” navy tasks.<sup>65</sup> This will require close, integrated partnerships with the Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Maritime Administration. The strategy highlights that current trends, if unaddressed, will render the naval services unable to protect American national interests within the coming decade. It stands within reason to ask whether they are capable of protecting them now. This strategy offers a way to put things right, to invest in the right technologies and programs to ensure American security in the decades to come. To actualize this grand vision will require coordination among all branches of government, the full support and financial commitment of the Congress, sustained commitment by service leaders and their institutions, and above all, the support and enthusiasm of the American taxpayer.

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