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US NAVY STRATEGY IN TRANSITION: IMPLICATIONS FOR MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION

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Introduction

The US Navy has undertaken a wide-ranging but still under publicized reassessment of American maritime strategy that seems almost certain to redefine the parameters of future Asia-Pacific security cooperation. Though various Chiefs of Naval Operations have sought to put their “brand name” on successive versions of maritime strategy, these formulations are often rationales designed to legitimate extant capabilities and doctrines, not rigorous assessments of ends, means, and policy tradeoffs. The current debate, however, reflects the growing recognition within the Navy leadership of the need for a deeper review of the future directions of US maritime strategy. But the deliberations have thus far been confined largely to Navy channels. As a result, the sources and consequences of potential change are not well understood outside the Navy.¹ To shed light on these issues, this paper will briefly review: (1) the primary factors that explain the reassessment of US policy; (2) the competing lines of argument; and (3) the potential implications of a new strategy for maritime security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Why the Need for A Strategic Reassessment?

US maritime strategy has long been premised on American naval supremacy and the capability of US forces to exercise unfettered control over the sea lines of communication. The experiences in two world wars and in the Cold War reinforced these convictions. US strategy posited the ability to project naval power globally, and the parallel ability to deny any prospective adversary the means to challenge US naval operations on the high seas or in various contested domains. These beliefs were most fully articulated in the maritime strategy developed in the final decade of the Cold War under Secretary of the Navy John Lehman.² US maritime dominance was premised on global strategic requirements and highly imposing naval forces, defined by the Reagan administration’s explicit pursuit of a “600 ship navy.” But the Reagan era naval buildup was maintained only fleetingly. By 1991, the Navy’s total force structure had declined to 538 ships; by 2002, this number had diminished to 318, even as the Navy leadership advocated a total fleet size of 375 ships.³ These reductions have persisted throughout the George W. Bush administration: the Navy’s end strength in mid-2006 stood at 281 ships, its lowest level of the post-World War II era.⁴ Moreover, absent a major surge in defense procurement that no military planners anticipate, there is little prospect of this trend being reversed anytime soon. (The Navy leadership’s announced fleet size goal currently stands at 313.)

¹ For a succinct distillation, consult Sam Bateman, “Analyzing the New US Maritime Strategy,” (Singapore: Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, August 15, 2006).

² For the definitive reconstruction, consult John B. Hattendorf, *The Evolution of the U.S. Navy’s Maritime Strategy, 1977-1986* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, Newport Paper #19, 2004).

³ Vern Clark, “Presence, Power, Precision-The United States Navy in the 21st Century,” *Sea Power*, April 2002, p. 19. Admiral Clark was Chief of Naval Operations during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

⁴ H.H. Gaffney, *Transforming U.S. Forces and the World: Are They Connected?* (Arlington, VA: The CNA Corporation, Center for Strategic Studies, July 2006), p. 108.

Such quantitative targets, though understandable as statements of institutional aspirations, seem contrived. Numerical objectives assume meaning only in the context of rigorous assessments of specific political and military requirements; as programmatic goals, they do not validate the worth or relevance of a given strategy. They beg two larger issues: what political, economic, and security purposes are US naval forces intended to serve? And what is the Navy's distinctive contribution to US national security in the new century? Numerical targets also do not address the technological or operational characteristics of a given naval force, or the specific missions to which these capabilities might be committed. Moreover, the prodigious investments underlying "big ticket" weapons programs –programs that the Congress remains willing to trim or extend but is almost never willing to eliminate- give such programs a life of their own. Despite massive increases in the US defense budget since 2001, the costs of new weapons systems and related manpower expenditures (even with additional reductions in personnel) have vastly outstripped the capacity of the services to replace older platforms.⁵ A recent Congressional Budget Office study, for example, projects a total fleet size in 2035 of 260 ships, even while assuming a 20 percent increase in the annual shipbuilding budget.⁶ Similarly, a RAND study measuring cost increases for production of amphibious ships, major surface combatants, attack submarines, and nuclear aircraft carriers over the past fifty years determined that the annual increases in these categories of expenditure ranged between 7 to 11 percent, amply exceeding increases in the Consumer Price Index.⁷

If the viability of Navy strategy were measured principally by the aggregate size of the fleet, an obvious solution would be to build smaller, less expensive ships, thereby increasing fleet size. But this has proven far more difficult in practice than in theory. Debate inside the Navy in the years prior to September 11 triggered major controversies about modernization priorities and strategy. One school of thought, represented by the President of the Naval War College, the late Vice Admiral Arthur Cebrowski, urged that the Navy reduce its long-standing commitment to major platform development and acquisition, thereby controlling the prodigious costs associated with manning and defending major naval assets. The crew of a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, for example, numbers approximately 5,000, and most of the ships attached to aircraft carrier strike groups are devoted to protecting the carrier. Admiral Cebrowski (though a career naval aviator) challenged long-prevailing Navy orthodoxy. He advocated development of more affordable, less manpower-intensive ships that would rely heavily on new information technologies. In his view, smaller ships could rely upon speed, stealth, and "networked" approaches to warfare that were quite literally beyond the capabilities of larger ships.⁸

⁵ Between 2001 and 2005, the US defense budget (exclusive of massive supplemental appropriations for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan) increased approximately 41%. Thom Shanker and Eric Schmitt, "Pentagon Budget Up, War Cost is Excluded," *New York Times*, February 8, 2005. The one exception to the reductions in US military personnel concerns special operations forces, which (according to the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review) will increase by approximately 15 per cent.

⁶ *Resource Implications of the Navy's Interim Report on Shipbuilding* (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office, April 25, 2005).

⁷ Mark V. Arena et al., *Why Has the Cost of Navy Ships Risen?-A Macroscopic Examination of the Trends in U.S. Naval Ship Costs Over the Past Several Decades* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, National Defense Research Institute, MG-484-NAVY, 2006).

⁸ Greg Jaffe, "Debate Surrounding Small Ship Poses Fundamental Questions for U.S. Navy," *Wall Street Journal*, July 11, 2001.

Admiral Cebrowski's concept was termed "network centric warfare."⁹ But his approach was primarily conceptual and experimental, rather than validated through combat experience. At the same time, the Navy leadership remained deeply committed to its power projection mission, with aircraft carriers at the core of this mission. Potent and highly protected naval platforms provided a distinctive capability that could bring massive power to bear in a wide range of contingencies. To most Navy leaders, lesser capabilities equated with increased risks to US security; it also posed major challenges to the Navy's bureaucratic interests and to the service's share of the defense budget. Though the Navy recognized to need to control costs in weapons systems development, this mandate proved almost impossible to fulfill in practice. One telling example is the DDG-1000, the Navy's next generation destroyer (also known as the Zumwalt-class destroyer), previously known as the DD(X). When first planned in the 1990s, this highly automated warship was expected to cost approximately \$750 million, with the Navy planning a total force of 32 ships. But the incorporation of an ever-wider array of new technologies into the ship design has driven the per-unit cost to \$3 billion, with the Navy now envisioning production of seven destroyers, rather than the original goal of 32. Some observers even doubt that the Congress or the Pentagon's senior civilian leadership will support this much smaller force, though a limited number seem certain to be built.¹⁰

Cost (as distinct from fleet size) has thus become the frequently unspoken factor that dominates procurement decisions, even as various high priority weapons systems are deemed untouchable in budget reviews. But the performance expectations from small numbers of major platforms have grown ever more demanding, severely limiting the Navy's modernization options in what has arguably become a much more complex security environment. The pivotal issue was and remains the balance among different types of capabilities geared to different roles and missions. Admiral Cebrowski's vision of the future navy (though still calling for the Navy to operate globally) was premised on operational goals very different from those traditionally associated with sea control. His principal focus was on expeditionary warfare and littoral access-i.e., the projection of naval power from the sea against land targets where major surface combatants lacked the necessary agility and flexibility, and where the presumed risks to larger ships were judged too great. Though attention to such possibilities had preceded Admiral Cebrowski, he was the first senior officer to envisage these missions in terms that diverged substantially from traditional power projection concepts.

When Donald Rumsfeld became Secretary of Defense in early 2001, he became a primary advocate of "military transformation," appointing Admiral Cebrowski the first director of the Pentagon's Office of Force Transformation.¹¹ Rumsfeld voiced growing concern about the risks posed by asymmetric threats to US forces. He was intent on undertaking a modernization agenda less wedded to institutional traditions, and geared toward the decisive, rapid application of military power against an array of non-traditional threats. Willingly or otherwise, the Navy leadership was compelled to respond to the policy agenda that Rumsfeld sought to advance. While still seeking to protect its core capabilities for major contingency

⁹ For a detailed overview, see Peter Dombrowski and Eugene Gholz, *Buying Military Transformation-Technological Innovation and the Defense Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), especially Chapter Three.

¹⁰ Jonathan Karp, "In Military-Spending Boom, Expensive Pet Projects Prevail," *Wall Street Journal*, June 16, 2006.

¹¹ Admiral Cebrowski resigned for health reasons in 2005, and he died in early 2006. No successor was ever designated for his directorship. Current reorganization plans at DoD will likely fold the Office of Force Transformation into a larger bureaucracy.

operations, the Navy also increased support for various experimental weapons systems, including the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS), a smaller ship geared to missions that larger platforms could not readily undertake. This commitment had been prefigured by the devastating attack on the USS Cole in Yemen in October 2000, underscoring the vulnerability of larger ships to terrorist attack. However, despite the underlying impulses underlying the LCS, the ship's attributes appear very different now that it has entered production. It is far heavier and more expensive than first envisioned, thereby diminishing many of the qualities that its advocates found so appealing at earlier stages of the design process.

September 11 and its aftermath triggered far larger pressures for policy change than anyone in the Navy had anticipated. Following the terrorist attacks on the United States, US national security strategy (though still retaining an explicit hedge against renewed major power competition, especially an emergent China) began to diverge from its previous focus on regional threats. US strategy would be increasingly address threats to the American homeland and to US forces deployed abroad by sub-national groups rather than nation states, and to how American military power could counter a much more diverse range of asymmetric threats. At the same time, the Bush administration deemed the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) the preeminent threat to US security. These concerns were fully identified in successive versions of the US national security strategy published in 2002 and 2006, and in related DoD planning documents. An emphasis on military preemption (though the invasion of Iraq was much more akin to preventive war), including the asserted right to the unilateral use of force, increasingly dominated US policy making.

The consequences of these shifts for the Navy were very pronounced. Although the Navy was involved in the Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns (especially through employment of carrier aviation), it did not play a dominant role in either war. The Navy emphasized that aircraft carriers (unlike the Air Force) could be deployed into zones of conflict without requiring negotiations for basing or overflight rights. Major surface combatants also comported with the decided US preference for "away games," leaving homeland security more the responsibility of the Coast Guard and other domestic agencies. But aircraft carriers (though capable of projecting major combat power over very long distances) lacked the capability for rapid intervention favored by the Pentagon's civilian leadership. Preempting or retaliating against threats posed by terrorist networks operating from highly remote areas of the world gave the Air Force an advantage in the bureaucratic competition. A carrier's awesome striking power still seemed far more suited to presence and deterrence missions, or for employment in major regional contingencies. In addition, large-scale coercive capabilities were often ill-suited to defeating terrorist networks, as distinct from the patient, deliberate effort to penetrate and uproot terrorist cells through intelligence collaboration, information sharing, financial sleuthing, and police investigations. As many observers have noted, references to counter-terrorism as a "war" seemed more metaphor than reality.

However, the aftermath of September 11 also necessitated reconsideration of how US power (alone or in concert with others) could be harnessed to a very different purposes, many of them directly involving the US Navy. This has prompted a searching reappraisal of the role of the Navy as an ocean-going force, and of the Navy's pride of place in future American strategy. These reviews remain ongoing, with the ultimate outcomes far from certain, but they suggest a very different concept of maritime strategy, with major implications for the role of the Navy in peacetime and wartime. They also highlight elements of competition and choice that the Navy must address, with major implications for future security cooperation.

Assessing the Debate

The Navy at present confronts major dilemmas and tradeoffs related to organization, mission, capability, and resource allocation. The operational demands imposed on the Navy have increased dramatically since September 11. DoD expects the Navy to fulfill its core missions of overseas presence, maintenance of sea lines of communication, and preparation for major military contingencies, while simultaneously enhancing its support for US military operations in the Persian Gulf and Greater Middle East, enlarging its substantial contributions to ballistic missile defense, and expanding its involvement in disaster relief and humanitarian operations. In addition, the risks associated with illicit commercial activities, WMD proliferation, piracy, and other illegal or threatening activities in the maritime domain have now assumed far greater salience. The Navy is also expected to accelerate the turnaround time for these missions, and with less dependence on traditional patterns of crew rotation. These increased demands are not a problem for the US Navy alone, but they intrude on Navy actions and plans in highly palpable ways. Indeed, the police-like functions inherent in some of these added missions have an ample lineage in the history of the US Navy: “command of the commons” is again part of the currency of US strategic debate.¹²

Theoretical excursions aside, such debate ultimately reduces to judgments about organizational purpose and resource allocation. In this respect, the Navy seems to speak with at least two distinct voices, though the views are not necessarily in direct conflict with one another. One view is rooted principally in a more operationally oriented approach to Navy responsibilities. As characterized by Admiral John Nathman, Commander of US Fleet Forces Command, the Navy has been asked to perform a “spectrum of missions,” geared to the distinctive attributes of naval power. These encompass the Navy’s larger shaping mission aimed at reducing the risks of armed conflict, to non-traditional “land-centric” issues in support of the Army and the Marines, to ensuring the access of US forces in zones of potential conflict, to underscoring the “persistent presence” of American power and influence, and to the continued ability to bring coercive power to bear in armed conflict. In Admiral Nathman’s view, arguments about the number of aircraft carriers based on affordability are “a canard...twelve is just barely the right number.”¹³

Admiral Nathman’s views (by dint of his organizational responsibilities) are necessarily more “Navy-centric” and “US-centric.” However, an alternative vision (though still attentive to the Navy’s institutional needs) has also emerged in senior leadership circles. In a speech delivered at the Naval War College in September 2005, Admiral Michael Mullen, then newly arrived as Chief of Naval Operations, described how shifting international circumstances were redefining the Navy’s roles and missions. His comments warrant extensive quotation:

When I [joined the Navy in 1964] it was all about big ships and blue water, training for the big fight, training to fight the big, bad 10-foot tall Soviets... The line was, take your Navy to sea and sink the enemy fleet. Period. Ah, the simplicity of it all. Well, it’s not so simple anymore. Ask any sailor who served aboard the USS Cole...in October of 2000...[Today] the joint application of sea

¹²Barry Posen, “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of US Hegemony,” *International Security*, Summer 2003. Posen extends his definition of “the commons” to the air and to space as well as the seas, but for my purposes I will focus principally on the maritime domain.

¹³ See Admiral Nathman’s interview with Christopher P. Cavas in DefenseNews.com, August 15, 2006.

power is...a critical part of [the] global community...Without mastery of the sea – without sea power—we cannot protect trade, we cannot help those in peril, we cannot provide relief from natural disasters, and we cannot intercede when whole societies are torn asunder by slavery, weapons of mass destruction, drugs, and piracy...We need a new [and] very different image of sea power. ..I [still] believe that we are first and foremost a war-fighting, sea-going service...The sea gives me access to where [the enemy] is and just as importantly where he isn't...[But] we need to rethink both the number and the types of ships we are building. We've got a...a fleet...that is particularly good at leveraging the joint application of sea power to fight and win during major combat operations. But we also need a fleet that can operate at the other end of the spectrum...I want a balanced fleet in every sense of the word...for naval forces, virtual presence is actual absence. If you're not there you can't do much. I'm after that proverbial 1,000 ship Navy –a fleet in being, if you will—composed of all freedom-loving nations, standing watch over the seas, standing watch over each other...We have proven the awesome capability of the sea when used for war. But we have yet to realize the full potential of the sea when leveraged for peace, prosperity, increased understanding, transparency, and pervasive security...The real potential of sea power...is the power of the sea to share and unite, to deter and defeat, to protect and to endure.¹⁴

Admiral Mullen's allusion to a "1,000 ship Navy" has gained increased currency in Navy debate. It is less a specific numerical goal than an imagined maritime future. As argued by Vice Admiral John Morgan, Jr. and Rear Admiral Charles Martoglio, the concept presumes a collective capability against a diverse range of maritime threats that no single maritime force –including the U.S. Navy can undertake on its own:

The process of globalization has inextricably linked nations together in a de facto security arrangement...Promoting and maintaining the security of the global maritime commons is a key element because freedom of the seas is critical to any nation's long-term economic well being...Likewise, the exploitation of the maritime commons by nations, groups, or individuals who seek to disrupt, destroy, or otherwise degrade security in the maritime domain must be considered a global challenge...The response to this dynamic security landscape will increasingly rely on regional nations to organize and coordinate activities in their areas...that...leads to their own region's prosperity and security...Policing the maritime commons will require substantially more capability than the United States or any individual nation can deliver...The 1,000-ship Navy is about the voluntary development of a network that vastly increases the number of sensors available to monitor security in the maritime domain while increasing the number of responders capable of ensuring maritime security.¹⁵

Though the above ideas still operate primarily at a conceptual level, their logic seems self-evident. It is not an argument about an either-or choice in autonomous capabilities versus multinational collaboration or about war fighting

¹⁴ Admiral Michael Mullen, Speech at the Naval War College, September 5, 2005, in InsideDefense.com, September 9, 2005.

¹⁵ Vice Admiral John Morgan, Jr. and Rear Admiral Charles Martoglio, "The Thousand Ship Navy-A Global Maritime Network," US Naval Institute Proceedings, November 2005. VADM Morgan is Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Information, Plans, and Strategy; RADM Martoglio is Director of the Navy's Strategy and Policy Division.

versus a spectrum of collaborative activities; even less does it presume a US-led force. Rather, the concept entails a dual-capable maritime coalition that addresses national and multinational security, forming habits of association and information-sharing and cultivating collaborative mechanisms that serve collective interests.

This shift in US Navy thinking leaves unaddressed the precise mix of war-fighting capabilities and regional security cooperation, and the priority devoted to each. As a sea-going force, the Navy is naturally disposed to the presence mission. But Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld has repeatedly pressured the Navy to hone its capability to “surge” maritime power, thereby giving less emphasis to the continuous presence mission that has long been the hallmark of US Asia-Pacific strategy. As Secretary Rumsfeld argued in a recent interview:

Ten years ago, we had...12 carrier battle groups and we were able to have out at any given time, deployed...three and [to] surge two more. And today, we have 11 carrier battle groups, and we can have five out and surge one. So...even though the numbers are smaller, we have vastly better presence in the world because of a whole set of [very creative] things that have been done by the Navy...they fly the crews out, so all the time going back and forth isn't wasted...they have a lot more spare parts. Therefore, the downtime is much shorter, and...we're able to double the capability almost. Second, the lethality of a carrier battle group is totally different from before... [W]ith a single airplane, you can attack 20 to 30 targets...transformation...[is] a process...I cast everything as moving...from a peacetime tempo to a wartime sense of urgency.¹⁶

The Navy leadership and the US Pacific Command have responded to these expectations, most fully in the Valiant Shield exercises conducted near Guam in June 2006. The sheer scale of the exercises -22,000 military personnel, 280 aircraft (including B-2 bombers deployed from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri), three carrier strike groups, and attack submarines attested to the capability of US commanders to organize and deploy a stunning array of combat power. This display of power clearly impressed the foreign military observers invited to the exercises, including ten representatives from China present at a US exercise for the first time. Deployments on this scale are hardly an everyday event; they would only be relevant to the most acute of military contingencies. Indeed, there has been no crisis of this scale in the Asia-Pacific region since the Korean War. (The Vietnam War, though a massive undertaking that at its peak involved more than a half million US military personnel, reflected a commitment that grew over a protracted period of time.) Beyond the large-scale test of US capabilities, however, Valiant Shield begs an obvious issue. Is the primary purpose of US deployments in the Pacific the capability to surge American combat power, as distinct from a wider range of missions and activities, many of which are reflected in the emergent concept of a 1,000 ship navy? Should the two ends of the spectrum be deemed largely distinct from one another? Or are the requirements in the latter instance a lesser included case in major contingency operations? For these questions, there are as yet no answers.

This indeterminacy poses very real challenges for the US Navy. Should it devote primary emphasis to the autonomous exercise of US power or to pursuit of a division of labor with various regional actors? How does the Navy reconcile enhancement of its combat capabilities with the much broader spectrum of threats and responsibilities (and commitment to enhanced international cooperation) detailed in *The National Strategy for Maritime Security*, signed by President Bush in

¹⁶ Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Interview with the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 20, 2006.

September 2005?¹⁷ Indeed, if some observers anticipated answers in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, they were disappointed. As noted in an assessment prepared by the International Institute for Strategic Studies:

[T]he most striking feature of the report is how much is left unsaid...[It] was notably silent on the size and structure of the navy; the only relevant comments were to endorse improved naval capabilities to operate in 'brown and green' waters, a reduction from 12 to 11 deployable aircraft carriers, a plan to build eight Maritime Prepositioning Ships, and production of two new submarines a year...[But] the Office of the Secretary of Defense has not formally issued any sign of support for overall shipbuilding plans for several years, and the new 313-ship plan, like the old 375-ship program[me], remains simply a navy proposal rather than Pentagon policy. Moreover, to maintain 313 ships, the navy will need to design...a new, lower cost major surface combatant...Yet, as is reflected in the QDR's absence of comment on 'blue water' capabilities, there is as yet no indication of the Pentagon's position either for or against any such initiative.¹⁸

Under such circumstances, the Navy's deliberations over future strategy seem wholly understandable. How will the Navy balance its ever more diverse requirements in an increasingly constrained budgetary environment? Will it be able to fashion policies that successfully bridge DoD's contingency-driven world with the possibilities for a cooperative security order? These questions remain fundamental, and the institutional ferment is palpable at present, but the policy outcomes are still far from settled.

Implications for Maritime Security Cooperation

US policy debate also correlates with major turbulence in the Asia-Pacific maritime environment. The unprecedented emergence of transnational issues, including piracy, drug smuggling, and potential disruption of trade and energy flows, environmental crises, humanitarian disasters, terrorist activities, and WMD-related transactions, all underscore the need for a new mechanisms and procedures for regional collaboration. However, continued incompatibilities between US policy and those of different regional actors (with divergent concepts of national sovereignty atop the list) continue to inhibit the development of a mutually acceptable policy framework. The United States asserts that it shares common maritime security goals with numerous regional states, and it sees maritime domain awareness as a means of enhancing international cooperation. But the continued US insistence on its inherent right to unilateral action to protect vital American interests leaves many regional actors wary of overly close association or information exchange with the United States. Divergent threat perceptions and what many see as highly intrusive but selectively applied US policies finds the roster of regional adherents to the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) limited to Japan, Australia, and Singapore, America's closest regional partners.¹⁹ The proposal of the Pacific Command for a Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI) provoked especially intense opposition from Malaysia and Indonesia, both of whom saw it as sharply infringing on national sovereignty.

¹⁷ *The National Strategy for Maritime Security* (Washington, DC: The White House, September 2005); see also "Maritime Security in the East Asia and Pacific Region," (Washington, DC: US Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, April 21, 2006).

¹⁸ "The Quadrennial Defense Review-Unanswered Questions," IISS *Strategic Comments*, March 2006.

¹⁹ Mark J. Valencia, *The Proliferation Security Initiative: Making Waves in Asia* (London: IISS, Adelphi Paper 376, 2005).

Not surprisingly, the states experiencing the highest comfort levels with US policy goals are long-time US allies and security partners. But for other states, collaboration with the United States will advance slowly, thereby testing the feasibility of broader cooperation. The US would clearly prefer more binding security arrangements in most areas (e.g. basing and access agreements, logistics support and intelligence collaboration, and contributions to joint exercises), but this presupposes a shared strategic concept that does not yet exist. Depending on the ultimate outcome of the Navy's strategic deliberations and the future trends in regional security, this process could advance in future years. But it will still depend very much on the types of transactions and understandings that the United States proposes. This will be an uneven process, reflecting variations in the capabilities of various states, the relative autonomy of different actors, and their perceived security alternatives. This bears in particular on the capacity and willingness of the US as well as other major regional actors to moderate absolute claims to unfettered freedom of action. Without such a shared political commitment, the prospective benefits of increased flows of information and confidence building will emerge slowly, if at all. The United States and the states of the Asia-Pacific region will thus either work jointly to reduce the risks to regional peace, prosperity, and security, or all will have to live with the uncertainties of a less predictable and potentially much more volatile world.