

## The Necessity of U.S. Naval Power

*Our maritime forces provide an unmatched advantage.*

By **GORDON ENGLAND, JAMES L. JONES, AND VERN CLARK**

All our citizens, and especially our servicemen and women, expect and deserve a thorough review of critical security decisions. After all, decisions today will affect the nation's strategic position for future generations.

The future security environment underscores two broad security trends. First, international political realities and the internationally agreed-to sovereign rights of nations will increasingly limit the sustained involvement of American permanent land-based, heavy forces to the more extreme crises. This will make offshore options for deterrence and power projection ever more paramount in support of our national interests.

Second, the naval dimensions of American power will re-emerge as the primary means for assuring our allies and partners, ensuring prosperity in times of peace, and countering anti-access, area-denial efforts in times of crisis. We do not believe these trends will require the dismantling of land-based forces, as these forces will remain essential reservoirs of power. As the United States has learned time and again, once a crisis becomes a conflict, it is impossible to predict with certainty its depth, duration and cost.

That said, the U.S. has been shrinking its overseas land-based installations, so the ability to project power globally will make the forward presence of naval forces an even more essential dimension of American influence.

What we do believe is that uniquely responsive Navy-Marine Corps capabilities provide the basis on which our most vital overseas interests are safeguarded. Forward presence and engagement is what allows the U.S. to maintain awareness, to deter aggression, and to quickly respond to threats as they arise. Though we clearly must be prepared for the high-end threats, such preparation should be made in balance with the means necessary to avoid escalation to the high end in the first place.

The versatility of maritime forces provides a truly unmatched advantage. The sea remains a vast space that provides nearly unlimited freedom of maneuver. Command of the sea allows for the presence of our naval forces, supported from a network of shore facilities, to be adjusted and scaled with little external restraint. It permits reliance on proven capabilities such as prepositioned ships.

Maritime capabilities encourage and enable cooperation with other nations to solve common sea-based problems such as piracy, illegal trafficking, proliferation of W.M.D., and a host of other ills, which if unchecked can harm our friends and interests abroad, and our own citizenry at home. The flexibility and responsiveness of naval forces provide our country with a general strategic deterrent in a potentially violent and unstable world. Most importantly, our naval forces project and sustain power at sea and ashore at the time, place, duration, and intensity of our choosing.

Given these enduring qualities, tough choices must clearly be made, especially in light of expected tight defense budgets. The administration and the Congress need to balance the resources allocated to missions such as strategic deterrence, ballistic missile defense, and cyber

warfare with the more traditional ones of sea control and power projection. The maritime capability and capacity vital to the flexible projection of U.S. power and influence around the globe must surely be preserved, especially in light of available technology. Capabilities such as the Joint Strike Fighter will provide strategic deterrence, in addition to tactical long-range strike, especially when operating from forward-deployed naval vessels.

Postured to respond quickly, the Navy-Marine Corps team integrates sea, air, and land power into adaptive force packages spanning the entire spectrum of operations, from everyday cooperative security activities to unwelcome—but not impossible—wars between major powers. This is exactly what we will need to meet the challenges of the future.

Mr. England is a former secretary of the Navy. Mr. Jones is a former commandant of the Marine Corps. Mr. Clark is a former chief of naval operations.