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## In My View

Sam J. Tangredi

Craig Faller

Melanie Butler

Robert E., Bublitz  
*U.S. Navy (Ret.)*

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# IN MY VIEW . . .

## Forward Presence and Littoral Warfare

Sir:

Dr. Edward Rhodes's analysis (" . . . From the Sea" and Back Again: Naval Power in the Second American Century, *NWCR*, Spring 1999) of the strategic rationale behind the Navy's shift from the Maritime Strategy of the 1980s to . . . *From the Sea* and *Forward . . . from the Sea* is insightful, as is his concern that the Navy's current littoral strategy is ill advised should the United States decide it no longer wants to remain engaged overseas to prevent dangers to U.S. interests and to respond to emergent threats. The United States, however, has wisely chosen not to adopt such a policy since World War II and is—in view of its continuing interest in a stable global interchange in an era of globalization—unlikely to do so in the twenty-first century. We therefore find Dr. Rhodes's admonition to eschew efforts to increase naval land attack and littoral warfare capabilities in favor of "blue water" missions to be less relevant to the future than the Navy's present strategic focus in the littorals and landward.

To understand the Navy's focus on forward presence and littoral warfare, one must recognize that the Navy has now achieved Mahan's prerequisite for seapower—command of the seas (albeit not by war). The Navy also recognizes that its mission as America's first line of defense has changed significantly: the absence of an adversarial ocean-going navy—coupled with the evolution of the increasing reach of U.S. naval weapons systems—means that the Navy can now

(in the words of the Chief of Naval Operations) “directly and decisively influence events on land.” For the first time, the Navy can bring its striking power to bear on even *landlocked* countries.

With a national security strategy of *engagement*, the purpose of our armed forces is to be prepared to respond to crises, while *shaping* the regional environment in support of our shared interests with allies and friends. The Navy does this most effectively by providing a credible combat presence forward in regions of vital interests. The Navy’s focus landward represents the realization, in the words of Commodore Dudley Knox, writing in 1932, of the “intimate relation between sea power and landpower” and of “the truth that basically all effort afloat should be directed at an effect ashore.”

This does not mean, however, that we can forget about the cardinal prerequisite of sea control: we must continue our robust capabilities and resourcing to maintain sea control in order to continue to influence events directly on land. Therefore, Dr. Rhodes is correct that we must maintain command of the seas if we are to ensure our forces can help “command” the land, since there are still a number of potential maritime threats to face: diesel submarines lurking at choke points, sophisticated mines, antiship cruise and potential ballistic missiles. But with our own powerful undersea warfare capabilities, developing organic counter mine warfare effort, increasing anti-cruise missile defenses, and soon-to-be-deployed theater ballistic missile defense program, these are challenges our littoral-focused Navy can meet. Utilizing land-attack cruise missiles and carrier-based airpower, we can defeat the area denial capabilities of our potential opponents in order to ensure our access forward. Utilizing operational maneuver from the sea, we can also deliver the U.S. Marine Corps directly to its land objective.

Given both the growing requirement for rapid crisis response in an era where speed matters and the Navy’s de facto control of the world’s oceans, how can we not direct our energies towards land? “. . . From the Sea” did not merely reflect a shift in naval strategy, it also represented the most cost-effective defense of U.S. interests the Navy could provide our nation. And today, along with extending the naval battlespace on to the land, we are also extending our future operations to two increasingly important regions: space and cyberspace. What Dr. Rhodes refers to as “the Second American Century” could also be seen as a “naval century,” in which the Navy also helps to provide America’s defense in the “oceans” of space and cyberspace.

Can the Navy provide all of America’s defense alone? Certainly not. But the Navy makes a very unique contribution through the sustained striking power of its forward-presence forces already deployed to regions of potential conflict. This is something Commodores Preble and Decatur of the eighteenth-century

Barbary pirate wars would recognize; it is also logic that would appeal to the twenty-first-century Mahan that Dr. Rhodes is looking for. Assuredly, if a global maritime blue-water threat were to arise again, the U.S. Navy retains the capacity to shift its focus swiftly to war at sea. Until that time, we are doing what seapower always was intended to do: influence the course of the events on land as directly and decisively as we can.

Commander Sam J. Tangredi  
 Commander Craig Faller  
 Lieutenant Melanie Butler

### Continental Air Defense

Sir:

Captain Bouchard's excellent and fascinating article ("Guarding the Cold War Ramparts: The U.S. Navy's Role in Continental Air Defense," *NWCR*, Summer 1999) contains two minor (and readily understandable) errors.

His reference on page 120 to "VW 1, based at Barbers Point and operating a detachment out of Naval Air Station Sangley Point" is incorrect. Sangley Point was not an NAS but a naval station. Also, the detachment there, although administratively subordinated to VW 1 (and later VW 3) was operationally independent, created when the Special Projects Division of Naval Station Sangley Point was designated VW 1 Detachment A. The Special Projects Division had been formed under VC 11's Miramar detachment and transferred intact with its four P4M-1Q Mercators to Sangley Point in October 1951. VW 3 Detachment A was later designated VQ 1.

Robert E. Bublitz  
 Commander, U.S. Navy (Ret.)  
 Special Projects Division/  
 VW-1 Det. A, 1951-53

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