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# Roles, Objectives and Tasks: An Inventory of the Functions of Navies

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*One of the most important things members of a profession must do is to think about their profession, in addition to practicing it. Naval officers must be able to answer such questions as "Why do we need a navy?" and "Does the Navy do anything useful in peacetime?" In a world characterized by instability, increasing complexity and the danger of nuclear conflict, naval officers cannot rely on pat answers or well-worn cliches. Professor Booth provides an extensive inventory of what navies can do in both peace and war.*

## **ROLES, OBJECTIVES AND TASKS: AN INVENTORY OF THE FUNCTIONS OF NAVIES**

by  
**Ken Booth**

Frankly, most of us find questions about our professional purpose at best too complicated and at worst something of a bore. For most of the time we are too busy cleaning in-trays, smoothing over yesterday's crisis and overlooking tomorrow's, to worry overly much about the essential nature of our jobs. We take them for granted. For most of us, for most of the time, this reluctance to worry about the big questions does not much matter. But for one group it does, and increasingly so. That group is the armed forces of the Western liberal democracies.

Social and international changes in the last 25 years have resulted in military professionals in general and naval officers in particular being regularly faced by the challenge to justify their existence. Not only have many officers found it increasingly difficult to meet this challenge, but at the same time their civilian audience has scrutinized their answers ever more closely. Technical innovation, social changes, and political pressures have combined to make the life of the contemporary naval officer far more stressful than that of any of his peacetime predecessors. Under pressure from all sides, it is hardly surprising if the busy officer, faced by the why-do-we-need-a-navy challenge, tends to resort to flip answers, the traditional cliches about seapower or inflated images of possible threats. But these replies will not do. They will not do either for a public which is more skeptical or for a generation of junior officers far less ready than their fathers to accept the words of those in authority. As time has passed the navies of the traditional

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maritime powers have faced more questioning about their functions, a greater demand for cost-effectiveness in their performance, and a greater skepticism of the answers. All these trends spell trouble for the naval officer who does not meet the taxing standards of the day. They put a premium on sophisticated answers and articulate officers at all levels. But finding such answers is obviously easier said than done. Because of the complexities of the modern situation it is often tempting merely to relay pat answers: There is relatively little guidance in the modern naval literature for those hoping to give a satisfactory appreciation, one which is both comprehensive and easily assimilated.

This article is designed to help thinking about these problems. Its method is simple but basic: It sets out merely to provide an inventory—sorted, annotated, and exhaustive—of the functions which navies have carried out, or might carry out in future.<sup>1</sup> By providing a comprehensive checklist of the functions which navies can perform several aims can be furthered: (1) The inventory will provide at least the beginnings of an answer to the question: why do we need a navy? (2) Concentration on objectives should help the problem of establishing the rational selection of resources, the determination of tactical and financial priorities, the optimum selection of weapons systems, and the focusing upon the responsibilities of the whole of a navy rather than upon any of its parts.<sup>2</sup> (3) Although inventories are not exciting reading, the present listing will be usable by students of the subject for a variety of purposes, namely as a reference point in their studies of the uses of navies in general or in particular, as a checklist for contemplating the usage of different types of ships, in their essays on the possible uses of warships in the support of foreign policy, in attempts to cut up the naval cake into as many basic “missions” as are thought desirable for satisfactory planning and explanation, and for the exhibition for uncertain junior officers or interested civilians of the character and extent of the functions which naval forces can perform in support of national policy in near or distant waters.

**The Use of the Sea.** At its simplest, navies have existed because while some groups have wanted to use the sea for various purposes, there has almost always been some possibility that others would seek to challenge that usage. The *raison d'etre* of navies therefore arises out of national needs in using the sea for: (1) the passage of goods and people; (2) the passage of military force for diplomatic purposes or for use against targets on land or in or on the sea; and (3) the exploitation of resources in or under the sea. Navies are therefore a *means* whereby a nation attempts to use the sea for its own purposes while attempting to prevent others from using it in ways which are to its disadvantage.

In identifying the functions which navies carry out in support of a country's general maritime interests, the inventory has been structured into three levels. The three levels of analysis which have been adopted are:

1. **Basic roles.** These are the main functions which navies are expected to perform, the general reasons for which they exist. For the purpose of clarity in explanation, these have been divided into the *Policing, Diplomatic, and Military roles.*<sup>3</sup>

2. **Policy objectives.** These refer to the specific purposes which belong to each of the basic roles.

3. **Operational tasks.** These are the ways in which planners translate policy objectives into modes of naval action. A further elaboration of this level might include detailed *tactics*, but that would be a needless complication in terms of the purpose of this inventory.

## I. THE POLICING ROLE

This role is concerned with maintaining authority within the state's maritime frontiers. Its subsidiary policy objectives are A. *Coast guard responsibilities* (extending sovereignty, maintaining good order, and ensuring resource enjoyment in contiguous seas),<sup>4</sup> and B. *Nation-building* (contributing to internal security and development).

### A. Coast guard responsibilities

#### Operational tasks:

- Customs
- Air-sea rescue
- Pollution watch
- Control of navigation
- Protect fishery vessels
- Ice patrol
- Deter and detain smugglers
- Deter and detain foreign agents
- Deter and detain all illegal entrants
- Prevent unauthorized departure of own citizens
- Protection from piracy
- Law enforcement in territorial waters

### B. Nation-building

#### Operational tasks:

- Assist in natural disasters
- Contribute to national development and modernization through education, construction, riverine work
- Contribute to civil order by transportation, deterrent patrol, and projection of force off coast and in rivers
- Blockade coast in event of major internal conflict

## II. THE DIPLOMATIC ROLE

This role is concerned with the use of navies in the support of foreign policy short of the actual employment of force. In this role navies are the handmaidens of diplomats in the carrying out of international bargaining: warships might have their effects by being kept in the background, or by being brought forward explicitly into the foreground. Within this role the subsidiary policy objectives can be classified as A. *Negotiation from strength*, B. *Manipulation*, and C. *Prestige*.

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### A. Negotiation from strength

#### 1. Reassure and strengthen allies and associates:

##### **Operational tasks:**

- Regular goodwill visits (with appropriate declaratory commitment)
- Naval aid
- By joint exercises, joint forces (even mixed-manning)  
symbolize solidarity and enhance deterrence
- Ensure access
- Deployments and demonstrations as tokens of support in areas of  
tension, of a preventive, preemptive, and reactive character

#### 2. Reassure and strengthen friendly governments threatened by serious internal challenge:

##### **Operational tasks:**

- By visits and deployment demonstrate general support,  
including the legitimizing of particular governments
- Deterrent presence offshore or in harbor to forestall  
violence and contribute to the maintenance of order
- Assist local government in transport of men and supplies
- Protect lives and property of friendly foreigners
- Intercept shipping supplying men or other supplies to "rebel" forces
- Use of naval-based aircraft for deterrence and/or surveillance
- By limited intervention ashore, assist in dealing with  
mutiny or other major internal challenge
- Blockade to affect outcome of civil unrest, or civil war
- Rescue and evaluate friendly foreigners after coup, civil war, etc.

#### 3. Reassure and strengthen friendly governments fearing external attack:

##### **Operational tasks:**

- Naval aid
- Reassurance visits
- Deterrent presence offshore or in harbor
- Reinforce an existing presence
- Patrol against small intrusions
- Contribute to reconnaissance and/or air defense
- Transport troops of friendly country
- By demonstrative actions, visits, deployments and firepower  
displays warn enemy of rising seriousness
- Deploy to preempt other third-party activities
- Threaten blockade
- Show of force to encourage compliance with international  
agreements
- Threaten intervention against unfriendly regime,  
by assembly or sailing of a fleet
- Show of force patrols by naval-based aircraft
- Threaten naval bombardment, air attack, amphibious assault
- Show of force to ensure "rules of the game" at sea are  
complied with

Support subversive activities from the sea in enemy countries

4. Change the behavior of friendly governments when the latter are facing the threat of external attack:

**Operational task:**

- Refrain from taking any of the actions indicated immediately above

5. Signal “business as usual” during a crisis:

**Operational task:**

- Maintain normal strength and operating patterns

6. Support or threaten force from the sea to support friendly governments contemplating acquisitive military action:

**Operational tasks:**

- Naval aid
- Contribute to surveillance and covert intelligence activities
- Support subversive activities from the sea against the target country
- Vague or specific menace of naval force to threaten conformity with desired policy
- Preventive deployments to discourage third-party intervention
- Provide the capability and flexibility to raise the level of violence for the naval aspects of the conflict

7. Improve bargaining position:

**Operational tasks:**

- Local deployment to indicate commitment to establish the right to be consulted
- Increase forces to improve bargaining strength
- By deployment and behavior attempt to neutralize the image of power accredited to other naval powers operating in the region
- By deployment and behavior attempt to encourage third-party countries to be deferential
- By deployment, well-timed cruises, harassment, calculated discourtesies (and accompanying propaganda) attempt to affect negotiations and local attitudes
- By harassment (interference with navigation and sideswipes) and diplomatic maneuver create the conditions for negotiation in a particular area for adversary or mutual withdrawal

8. Threaten force from the sea to support policy:

**Operational task:**

- Vague or specific menace of naval force (supported by deployments, force augmentations, diplomatic actions, etc.) directed with inducing conformity with desired policy

9. Improve one's ability to affect the course of specific diplomatic negotiations

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### **Operational tasks:**

- Provide venue for meetings
- Dispatch of warships to add weight to diplomatic negotiations
- Deploy warships to symbolize power in negotiations
- Display warships as bargaining chips in negotiations
- Dispatch of warships to influence negotiations between third parties
- Use warships to symbolize independence in negotiations

### **B. Manipulation**

#### 1. Manipulate bargaining positions within an alliance:

##### **Operational tasks:**

- By showing excellence or special contribution in the naval field, establish the right to be consulted, and increase decisionmaking status within an alliance
- Refrain from actions which attempt to reassure and strengthen allies
- By reducing forces, changing deployment area, etc., indicate declining interest in specific situations
- Refrain from actions supportive of allies threatened by use of force
- Use disengagement to discipline local ally, or show disapproval of particular action
- Harass warships of allies to show disapproval
- Interpose between hostile allies

#### 2. Demonstrate support to different countries:

##### **Operational tasks:**

- Help in natural disasters
- Symbolic visits to demonstrate support for change of government, and later to underline legitimacy of friendly regime
- Well-publicized visits of reassurance
- Naval aid
- Use warships to transport friendly rulers
- State and other official visits
- Venue for diplomatic meetings

#### 3. Gain or increase access to new countries:

##### **Operational tasks:**

- Naval aid, including advisers, sales, gifts, and related activities such as mine-clearing, port-clearing, etc.
- Use naval visits as opportunity to gain access to new countries
- Use naval visits as opportunity to develop relations
- Use visits to keep the country's policy in the mind of local decisionmakers
- Use visits to project a favorable general image, or impressive naval capability, to make the target country more susceptible
- Use visits backed by propaganda to symbolize a growing commitment

**4. Build up foreign navies and create proxy threats:**

**Operational tasks:**

- As above

**5. Create a degree of naval dependency:**

**Operational tasks:**

- As above

**6. To provide standing demonstrations of naval power in distant waters to establish the right to be interested:**

**Operational tasks:**

- By demonstrating permanent military capability, become accepted as local power
- Maintain a presence to underline a commitment
- Vary the strength and behavior of a presence to imply changes in policy, and by the character of the deployment attempt to reassure some, and decrease confidence of others
- Exercise vague menace, show interest, deter, take advantage of favorable situations, provide insurance
- Suddenly reinforce commitment to show concern
- By presence attempt to minimize the impact on third parties of the presence of others

**C. Prestige**

**1. Provide psychological reassurance for home community:**

**Operational tasks:**

- See the tasks with "hearts and minds" connotations under the Policing Role
- Visits, displays, and presentations

**2. Project a favorable general image of one's country:**

**Operational tasks:**

- Show excellence (including firmness or forbearance) in the performance of all tasks, supported by suitable diplomatic and propaganda efforts in target countries

**3. Project an image of impressive naval force:**

**Operational tasks:**

- As above, with a naval emphasis

**III. THE MILITARY ROLE**

The threat and use of force from the sea is the essence of a navy's existence. It is the possibility of violence at sea which gives rise to navies, and



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actual or latent violence is the currency in which they deal. The ability of a navy to threaten and use force is the basis of a navy's significance: Its diplomatic impact is related to perceptions of its military prowess, while its utility in conflicts is determined by its ability to discharge its missions successfully. For the purposes of this inventory, the military role has been subdivided into wartime and peacetime activities. The former are described as *balance of power* functions (that is, pertaining to the structuring of an acceptable international order) while the latter are described as *projection of force* functions (that is, pertaining to the actual employment of force at any or all points across the spectrum).

### Balance of power

#### A. Strategic nuclear deterrence

1. Deter attack on the homeland, and the homeland of allies
2. Provide secure situation in which to promote foreign policy interests
3. Contribute to the nation's ability to negotiate from a position of recognized strength
4. Counter deterrent tasks

#### Operational tasks:

- SSBNs on station
- Strike carriers on station
- Weapons testing activities
- Recognized assured destruction capability
- Tracking, marking, gathering intelligence on adversary deterrent forces

### Balance of power:

#### B. Conventional deterrence and defense

1. Prepare for wartime tasks:

#### Operational tasks:

- Exercising and readiness of relevant units
- Maintain amphibious forces for cooperation with army
- Build up infrastructure for war, e.g., sensor
- Oceanography
- Surveillance
- Shadow potential threats, both under and above the surface of the sea

2. Deter hostile intrusion:

#### Operational tasks:

- Deterrent exercises and patrol
- By ready air and sea surveillance demonstrate to any potential intruder that intrusion will be met

- Discourage, by seizure or harassment, unfriendly naval presences offshore (e.g., intelligence gatherers)
- Demonstrate the ability to raise the level of violence against intruders

**3. Contribute to local maritime stability:**

**Operational tasks:**

- Protect airspace above the sea for national or other transport
- Supervise, and if necessary enforce jurisdiction at sea

**4. Protect national claims in contiguous seas:**

**Operational tasks:**

- Ensure access to national claims
- Protect and supervise the activities of merchant vessels and fishing fleets in contiguous seas
- Protect and supervise the exploitation of minerals on or under the seabed

**5. Extend national claims in contiguous seas:**

**Operational task:**

- Patrol, harassment, seizure

**Balance of power:**

**C. Extended deterrence and defense**

**1. Protect state activities on the high seas:**

**Operational tasks:**

- Support space-related activities (provide communications, supervise splashdown)
- Supervise weapons testing activities (mark out test areas and danger zones, patrol and supervise missile firings and nuclear explosions)

**2. Protect the lives, interests, and property of nationals (and others) operating in distant waters:**

**Operational tasks:**

- Provide assistance in event of natural disaster
- Supervise, protect, discipline, and assist national merchant ships and fishing fleets
- Protect shipping against piracy
- Protect shipping against harassment, blockade and other state interference
- Operate convoy in unfriendly waters

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3. Protect the lives, interests, and property of nations (and others) overseas threatened by local disturbance or natural disaster:

**Operational tasks:**

- Support nationals by routine visits in normal times
- Reassure nationals by presence in times of trouble
- Evacuate nationals from foreign countries after natural disasters, and provide relief and rescue
- Interpose to protect national economic stakes in foreign country during disturbance
- Break blockade against own nationals
- Inject forces to deter attack on nationals
- Interpose between hostile parties in local dispute
- Protect or evacuate nationals and/or foreign sympathizers in civil disturbance or civil war

4. Local maritime defense of distant national territories:

**Operational tasks:**

- Carry out range of coast guard activities
- Contribute to internal security
- Maritime defense in contiguous seas
- Maintain access
- Presence to symbolize continuing commitment

5. Develop operating techniques for the essential wartime tasks:

**Operational tasks:**

- Maintain strength and readiness for war, including the ability to fight at various levels of hostility
- Exercise in distant waters
- Shadow potential threats
- Develop tactics to control surface, air, subsurface operations in the relevant geographical areas
- Develop operating procedures for using the sea for the projection of power ashore, blockade, bombardment, the supply of military, industrial, and other needs to overseas areas
- Develop tactics to deny to the enemy control of surface, air, and subsurface operations in the relevant geographical areas

6. Build up an infrastructure for the performance of major war-related missions:

**Operational tasks:**

- Build up and consolidate bases and other shore facilities
- Develop sea communications with allies and associates
- Ensure access to facilities for war, e.g., underwater sensors

7. Demonstrate commitment to allies:

**Operational task:**

- As above, under negotiation from strength, strategic deterrence, and extended deterrence

**Balance of power:**

**D. International order**

1. Contribute to general maritime stability:

**Operational tasks:**

- Support an internationally recognized law of the sea
- Assert the right of innocent passage
- Protect airspace above the sea for national or other transport
- Attempt to break "illegal" blockade

2. Do not support maritime stability:

**Operational task:**

- Use naval forces to challenge the above, to extend national claims, etc.

**Projection of force:**

**A. Guerrilla wars, limited wars, and interventions**

1. To control the areas of the sea required for national or allied use, for acquisitive or retaliatory purposes.
2. To use the seas controlled for the transportation of men and supplies.
3. To use the seas for the projection of power ashore against opposition.
4. To challenge and deny the enemy's ability to use the sea for his own purposes.
5. To meet the naval challenge at whatever level is considered militarily and politically desirable.
6. Support international peacekeeping operations.

**Operational tasks:**

- Seize or harass foreign shipping on behalf of friendly government
- Detain foreign ships at sea or in port
- Interfere with right of innocent passage in order to press national claims
- Use harassment or seizure of naval units or merchant ships for retaliatory purposes
- Close sea areas to foreign shipping
- Closure of straits for bargaining chips
- Apply pressure through mining of sea area, straits, harbor entrances, etc.
- Limited shore bombardment as punishment for hostile act
- Landing of a punitive expedition
- Send force ashore and seize hostages
- Retaliate at sea for pressures on land

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- Seize island, town, or strategic point for bargaining purposes
- Contest islands and territories where ownership disputed,  
by preemptive occupation or fighting
- Nonbelligerent blockade
- Blockade, national or international
- Attempt control of air, surface, and subsurface in  
relevant zones
- Maintain sea communications to allies
- Break blockade
- Use aircraft over the sea for reconnaissance, interception,  
strike, minelaying
- Use aircraft over the land for reconnaissance, interception,  
logistics support, tactical and strategic strike
- Provide air defense, reconnaissance, logistic etc., support  
for ally or associate (government or nongovernment or  
international organization)
- Intercept shipping supplying men or supplies to "rebel" forces
- Contribute to subversive activities against foreign countries
- Self-protection of naval task forces and joint service task forces
- Show of naval force to ensure "rules of the game" at sea are  
complied with
- Deterrent presence offshore or in harbor
- Deter larger intrusion by deployment or reinforcement
- Support land operations (own or allied) by naval gunfire
- Escort troops to theater of operations
- Logistics support, by ship and naval aircraft
- Patrol or interpose against possibility of large-scale  
invasion or small intrusion
- Preemptive occupation of islands and pieces of territory
- Inject marines temporarily to coerce conformity with desired policy
- Maintain sea communications to allies, associates, and own forces
- Protect/evacuate foreign governments to underline sympathy  
and support
- Contribute to overt and covert intelligence gathering
- Brown water navy
- Support land operations by naval air support, either  
tactically or strategically
- Amphibious landings, to occupy territory
- Assist forces of international organization to interpose  
between hostile parties in local dispute
- Destroy enemy ships and commerce
- Protect convoys against interference
- Anonymous sinkings
- Local naval engagements
- Undertake a "total wet war" against the enemy's maritime efforts
- Destroy enemy bases
- Deny the enemy the ability to use the sea for the foregoing  
purposes, by blockade, attacking his naval and merchant  
shipping, by ASW, by attack from the air, etc.

**Projection of force:**

**B. Conventional war**

1. To control the areas of the sea required for national or allied use, for acquisitive or retaliatory purposes.
2. To use the seas controlled for the transportation of men and supplies.
3. To use the seas controlled for the projection of power ashore.
4. To contest and seek to deny the enemy's ability to use the sea for his own purposes.
5. To meet the naval challenge at whatever level is considered militarily and politically desirable.

**Operational tasks:**

- As immediately above where relevant
- Defend homeland against hostile intrusion from the sea
- Deception
- Transfer and supply own land, sea, and air forces
- Transfer raw materials and industrial goods
- Support army operations by air and sea gunfire, logistic backup, and transportation
- Protect convoys
- Damage limitation efforts by attacking enemy seaborne strike platforms
- Maintain sea communications to allies and associates
- Maintain maritime security in distant national territories
- Support land operations by amphibious operations
- Apply pressure by mining
- Apply pressure by blockade
- Destroy the enemy's main forces at sea
- Destroy the enemy's naval bases
- Use aircraft over the sea for reconnaissance, interception, strike, minelaying
- Use aircraft over the land for reconnaissance, interception, logistic support, tactical and strategic strike.

**Projection of force:**

**C. Nuclear War**

1. To control the areas of the sea required for national or allied use, for acquisitive or retaliatory purposes.
2. To use the seas controlled for the transportation of men and supplies.
3. To use the seas controlled for the projection of power ashore.
4. To contest and seek to deny the enemy's ability to use the sea for his own purposes.

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5. To meet the naval challenge at whatever level is considered militarily and politically desirable.

6. To use the seas for strategic nuclear retaliation, or its deliberate withholding.

### Operational tasks:

- As above where relevant
- Withhold strategic nuclear bombardment for bargaining purposes
- Contribute to initial nuclear strikes
- Strategic nuclear bombardment
- Bring relief, succor, rescue

**Intelligence.** One task which navies perform which contributes to the prosecution of all the others is the gathering of information of a military, political, or economic type.

### Operational tasks:

- Oceanography
- Surveillance of missile firings, nuclear explosions, weapons testing
- Surveillance of other navies, their tactics, techniques, exercise patterns, capabilities, etc.
- Close electronic surveillance of foreign countries
- Protection of intelligence gathering ships in sensitive areas
- Deployment of and access to covert sensors in distant waters
  - By covert methods support intelligence cells in foreign countries
- Provision of intelligence and early warning of hostile movements on behalf of others in limited wars
- Use of submarines for inshore covert surveillance

**Conclusion.** This inventory should have demonstrated several things: (1) It should have proved conclusively that warships are an inherently multipurpose instrument of policy; and (2) it should, by showing the subtlety and overlapping character of many usages, have underlined the fact that simply *describing* the functions of navies is a task which is as worthwhile as it is complex. Having said that, two warnings are necessary: (1) The inventory is not meant to suggest the *utility* of different usages, that is whether the objectives which might be secured by naval operations will outweigh costs in particular instances; and (2) the inventory is not meant to be a model in any sense, that is a standard against which particular navies might measure themselves. Different countries have different interests in using the sea, and hence the size and character of their naval forces, and their strategies and tactics, will differ accordingly. However, the *raison d'etre* of all navies can be understood within the framework adopted by the inventory in this article, namely:

### I. The Policing Role

#### A. Coast guard responsibilities

#### B. Nation-building

## II. The Diplomatic Role

- A. *Negotiation from strength*
- B. *Manipulation*
- C. *Prestige*

## III. The Military Role

- A. *Balance of power*
- B. *Projection of force*

This framework is both true to life and leaves the observer in no doubt as to what ultimately navies are *for*. By focusing on roles and objectives, one places oneself one level above arguments about "missions" such as naval presence; it is very easy to become embroiled in contentious discussions about the definition and usefulness of such concepts. Adoption of this proposed framework would clarify the problem of describing the objectives of a particular navy. It would thereby help minimize the confusion which listeners sometimes have when they hear naval spokesmen change the number and styling of their service's basic "missions" with all the frequency with which the average taxpayer changes his car. If the professionals give the impression that they are not sure what they are *for*, can they really expect the population at large to be other than wary?

## BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Ken Booth received his B.A. in the Department of International Politics at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. He has taught there since 1967, specializing in strategic studies. His publications include *The Military Instrument in Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1972* (1974); joint editor of *Soviet Naval Policy: Objectives and Constraints* (1975); coauthor of *Contemporary Strategy: Theories and Policies* (1975); and his own *Navies and Foreign Policy* (1977).

## NOTES

1. With the exception of possible roles and tasks in nuclear war, the inventory is based on particular historical episodes mentioned in the literature on naval strategy.

2. On the value of a functional approach, see Stansfield Turner, "Missions of the U.S. Navy," *Naval War College Review*, March-April 1974, pp. 2-17.

3. This trinity of roles is discussed in my *Navies and Foreign Policy* (New York: Crane, Russak, 1977), especially Chap. I.

4. This is based upon J.R. Hill, *The Rule of Law at Sea*, unpublished thesis, Department of Laws, University of London, King's College, 1972, pp. 172-3.

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