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# TIME FOR A COAST GUARD OPERATING CONCEPT

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**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**TIME FOR A COAST GUARD OPERATING CONCEPT**

by

Christjan C. Gaudio

September 2022

Co-Advisors:

Wayne Porter  
Nadav Morag (contractor)

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**TIME FOR A COAST GUARD OPERATING CONCEPT**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Coast Guard is a military service whose role is broader, and less defined, than other services, since it encompasses military missions, law enforcement, search and rescue, marine safety and other statutory missions. The Navy's role is to attain command of the seas, the Army's to occupy and hold land in support of national objectives, the Air Force's to attain air supremacy, the Space Force's to attain space supremacy, and the Marine Corps' to project power from the sea in support of naval strategy and national objectives. These services have a culture that is best adapted to conventional, high-end, nation-state conflict, and while they fight unconventionally when necessary, the institutional preference is for conventional conflict. Despite instances throughout history where these services regularly conduct Phase 0 (shaping the operational environment) theater cooperation, partner building, and humanitarian/disaster relief operations, these activities are nested within a military culture focused on national defense. Coast Guard capabilities focused on stability are underutilized in the Joint Force construct, which spreads stabilization efforts across the services despite their focus on conventional nation-state conflict.



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Strategic competition with nation states below the level of armed conflict is a strategic reality for the foreseeable future. The United States cannot afford to cede the knowledge gained in irregular conflict during the Global War on Terror in favor of a renewed focus on nation-state conflict à la Air Land Battle and Air Sea Battle. Visionary change is needed to align the military services so that the nation can continue to address irregular threats, such as stabilization, as well as conventional threats by providing both deterrence against nation-state warfare as well as capabilities necessary to protect national interests globally. The Coast Guard could have a key role in addressing the nation's security concerns while enabling diplomatic objectives related to strategic competition in the maritime domain. Development of a comprehensive Coast Guard Operating Concept aligns service efforts and missions along stabilization providing the Joint Force with a military service wholly focused below the threshold of near peer armed conflict in the maritime domain. A comprehensive operating concept mirroring those released by the Army and Marine Corps could align service cultures and internal communities behind a unifying and comprehensive mission carving out a unique niche for the Coast Guard within the Joint Force.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to the Tactical Operators at Tactical Law Enforcement Team Pacific. Thank you for standing the watch. The Coast Guard stands at a unique inflection point in United States history and will continue to support national strategy and global presence by modeling accepted norms in the maritime environment that reinforce civil authority and the rule of law. Tactical Law Enforcement Teams and their deployable Law Enforcement Detachments are the Coast Guard's force of choice and just one way in which the service can project an example that reinforces the U.S.-led, rules-based order.

To my thesis committee, thank you for your support and encouragement in keeping with this endeavor. You helped me stay the course. I look forward to working together again.

Thank you, family, for supporting me in this endeavor. While I am away on patrol, you hold things together and keep things moving at home. Without your love and support, my professional accomplishments mean nothing.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Coast Guard is on the front lines of our Nation’s effort to protect the American people, our homeland, and our way of life. We are a unique instrument of national power with specialized and adaptive capability across the full spectrum of maritime activities.

—Admiral Karl L. Schultz, Commandant, *Coast Guard Strategic Plan 2018–2022*<sup>1</sup>

Assertive economic and military growth in China and aggressive policies in Russia are challenging United States hegemony following twenty years of irregular conflict in the Middle East. The Joint Doctrine Note 1-19 identified competition as “a fundamental aspect of international relations” as nation-states pursue their own interests to gain strategic advantage.<sup>2</sup> Effective competition involves coordination across the instruments of national power and how such instruments are employed. For the Joint Force, this necessitates better coordination among the military services in support of national objectives. The competition continuum (see Figure 1) describes a world neither at peace nor at war but in “enduring competition conducted through a mixture of cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict.”<sup>3</sup> It is in the area below armed conflict, frequently referred to as the “grey zone,” that the Joint Force must rebalance and identify organizations that will enable them to support U.S. objectives and the maintenance of stability.<sup>4</sup>

The Coast Guard is uniquely suited to do this as it bridges the gap in United States policy between military power and law enforcement. With authorities codified under Title 14 of the *U.S. Code*, and falling within the Department of Homeland Security rather than

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, *Coast Guard Strategic Plan 2018–2022* (Washington, DC: U.S. Coast Guard, 2018), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Competition Continuum*, JDN 1–19 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2019), v.

<sup>3</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, v.

<sup>4</sup> James M. Dubik, *America’s Global Competitions: The Gray Zone in Context* (Washington, DC: Institute of War, 2018), 10.

the Department of Defense, the USCG remains a branch of the armed forces with unique law enforcement authorities in the maritime domain, capable of operating globally and competing below the level of armed conflict. It is time for the organization to develop a holistic operating concept focused on further leveraging its strengths and capabilities within the Joint Force in areas of strategic competition, to operate below the threshold of armed conflict.



Figure 1. Competition Continuum<sup>5</sup>

#### A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Coast Guard is a military service whose role is broader and less defined than other services, since it encompasses military missions, law enforcement, search and rescue, marine safety, and other statutory missions. The Navy “protects America at sea”; the Army’s role is “to deploy, fight, and win our Nation’s wars by providing ready, prompt, and sustained land dominance”; the Air Force’s role is “to fly, fight and win—airpower

<sup>5</sup> Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), 8.

anytime, anywhere”; the Space Force’s roles is “to conduct global space operations that enhance the way our joint and coalition forces fight”; and the Marine Corps’ role is “to be the premier self-sufficient expeditionary force.”<sup>6</sup> Each service has a culture that is primarily designed for conventional, high-end, nation state conflict, although they fight unconventionally when necessary and pursue a variety of operations in the national interest. Despite instances throughout history when these services regularly conduct Phase 0 (shaping the operational environment) theater cooperation, partner-building, and humanitarian/disaster relief operations, these activities are nested within a military culture focused on national defense.

In this context, the Coast Guard is the longest, continuous sea-service with a history extending back to 1790. Like the Navy, the commissioned, warrant, and enlisted personnel wear a military uniform, must abide by the uniform code of military justice, and crew military aircraft and warships. Its location within the Department of Homeland Security isolates it from other members of the Joint Force, and its size limits its staffing and participation in Joint Force activities. The *Coast Guard Strategic Plan 2018–2022* seeks to create a comprehensive operating concept that adequately addresses the challenges of today’s strategic environment, encapsulates its statutory missions, and focuses on providing stability operations within the Joint Force as a way to contribute to the larger national effort focused on strategic competition.<sup>7</sup> These missions includes “port and waterway security, drug interdiction, aids to navigation, search and rescue, living marine resources, marine safety, defense readiness, migrant interdiction, marine environmental protection, ice operations, law enforcement,” and national intelligence responsibilities. These twelve missions can be leveraged to enable civil authority while contributing to, and

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<sup>6</sup> “Mission Statement,” U.S. Navy Office of Information, accessed July 8, 2022, <https://www.navy.mil/About/Mission/>; “The Army Vision,” Department of the Army, accessed July 8, 2022, [https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/vision/the\\_army\\_vision.pdf](https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/vision/the_army_vision.pdf); “Mission,” Department of the Air Force, accessed July 8, 2022, <https://www.airforce.com/mission>; “United States Space Force Mission,” U.S. Space Force, accessed July 8, 2022, <https://www.spaceforce.mil/About-Us/About-Space-Force/Mission/>; “Mission,” U.S. Marine Corps, accessed July 8, 2022, <https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/e2o/Mission-Vision/>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, *Strategic Plan 2018–2022*.

enforcing, the maritime global rules-based order.<sup>8</sup> The Coast Guard works “best on the periphery of the continuum of joint operations where it can use its constabulary functions to shape the operational environment and deter competitors prior to a conflict while post conflict it stabilizes the environment and enables civil authorities.”<sup>9</sup>

Stability, as a Joint Force mission, is a broad category that uses “one or more instruments of national power to minimize, if not eliminate, economic and political instability and other drivers of violent conflict,” complementing newly developed doctrine regarding competition.<sup>10</sup> Stability is focused on reinforcing positive and mutually beneficial relationships with allies and partners to reduce tension and to create an operational environment conducive to the reduction of conflict. With most of the military services focused on the challenges posed by conventional force-on-force conflicts, the Joint Force stands to lose sight of valuable lessons learned from recent experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. Addressing competition below armed conflict complements more traditional military activities by providing persistent presence prior to conflicts, preparing the battlespace for military entry operations, and enabling civil authority and recovery post conflict.

The twelve Coast Guard statutory missions, along with its three defined roles of “safety, security and stewardship” dovetail under the larger umbrella of stability.<sup>11</sup> Various Coast Guard strategies focus on specific missions with recent publications emphasizing responsibilities in the Arctic and Cyber domains, as well as one specifically focused on international, unreported and unregulated fishing activities.<sup>12</sup> Coast Guard doctrine and culture emphasize the multi-mission capabilities of the service and divide its missions

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<sup>8</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, *U.S. Coast Guard: America’s Maritime Guardian*, CGP 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Coast Guard, 2009), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Christjan Gaudio, “The Coast Guard and Stability Operations,” *Small Wars Journal* (2020), <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/coast-guard-and-stability-operations>.

<sup>10</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Stability*, JP 3-07 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2016), ix.

<sup>11</sup> “Coast Guard Roles and Missions,” U.S. Coast Guard Academy, accessed July 8, 2022, <https://www.uscga.edu/roles-and-missions/>.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, *Arctic Strategic Outlook* (Washington, DC: U.S. Coast Guard, 2019); U.S. Coast Guard, *Cyber Strategy* (Washington, DC: U.S. Coast Guard, 2015); U.S. Coast Guard, *Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing Strategic Outlook* (Washington, DC: U.S. Coast Guard, 2020).

among maritime safety, security, and stewardship roles.<sup>13</sup> A comprehensive Coast Guard operating concept can better define and unify these roles under the Joint Force mission of stability, which encompasses all of the Coast Guard’s statutory missions and is complementary to the humanitarian nature and culture of the service. This is highlighted by the below picture which shows the elements of a stable state. The Coast Guard functions best at the intersection of the three circles reinforcing the rule of law through maritime presence, providing for economic prosperity through regulatory functions and providing security through coastal control and maritime law enforcement.

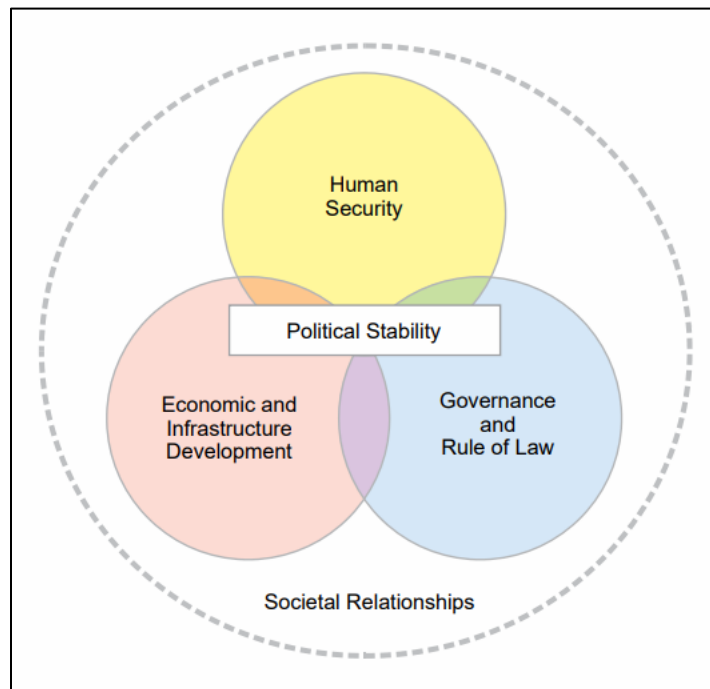


Figure 2. Elements of a Stable State<sup>14</sup>

## B. RESEARCH QUESTION

What should a comprehensive Coast Guard operating concept designed to define and unify its missions and roles under a joint force mission of stability entail?

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<sup>13</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, *Doctrine for the U.S. Coast Guard*, CGP 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Coast Guard, 2014), 7–17.

<sup>14</sup> Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Stability*, 1–9.

## C. RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative, exploratory research methodology for this thesis is largely based on the Joint Staff's Joint Doctrine Development Process Proposal Phase.<sup>15</sup> The Joint Staff process has been adapted by the author to reflect and dovetail Coast Guard capabilities, doctrine, and processes. The research uses official publications and published literature to address the thesis research question. The doctrine development process of this thesis is used to articulate the next logical step for Coast Guard strategy and proposes that the service focus on irregular warfare, specifically stabilization, to meet U.S. objectives in strategic competition.

The Joint Doctrine Development Process Proposal Phase outlines a process for developing a concept into doctrine by identifying the perceived gap in guidance, explaining how the new guidance fills the identified void. This involves listing required capabilities, scoping a solution, and recommending command relationships needed to implement the proposed doctrine.<sup>16</sup> Official strategic publications will be used to identify Coast Guard documentation and guidance for providing support.

This research will seek to identify and explain service contributions to strategic competition through the construct of stabilization and irregular warfare. Previous research related to national strategies, joint doctrine, Coast Guard doctrine, and United States Code will be used throughout the process to support the thesis and to explain Coast Guard authorities and capabilities.

- Chapter I introduces the Coast Guard operating concept focused on stabilization as a means to address strategic competition.
- Chapter II outlines capstone concepts through national strategies, joint doctrine, and academic literature, and introduces the idea for a Coast Guard framework that complements existing Department of Defense

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<sup>15</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Doctrine Development Process*, B-3.

<sup>16</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, B-4.

frameworks for expanding United States capabilities in the competition space.

- Chapter III addresses the Joint Doctrine Development Process. It begins by explaining the joint operating environment and discusses the relationship between the Coast Guard, the Department of Homeland Security, the Joint Staff, and the Department of Defense, exploring the challenges the Joint Force has addressing strategic competition at the threshold below armed conflict. Chapter III transitions into an analysis of the Coast Guard, its role within the Joint Force, and then makes recommendations on how to synchronize efforts to both enable and optimize the service to support strategic competition.
- Chapter IV summarizes the information in Chapter III and submits the recommendation that the Coast Guard develop a service level operating concept unifying efforts across statutory missions focused on stabilization and reinforcement of the rule of law.
- Chapter V summarizes the findings and provides recommendations for further study.

The Joint Staff’s Joint Doctrine Development Process is used to support a qualitative, exploratory research methodology that will logically organize and present the material in this thesis.<sup>17</sup>

#### **D. SIGNIFICANCE**

Current United States strategic thought is focused on competition with nations that are both competitors and economic peers. The Department of Defense defines strategy as using “the power available . . . to exercise control over people, places, things, and events to achieve objectives in accordance with . . . national interests and policies.”<sup>18</sup> The recent

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<sup>17</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, B-4.

<sup>18</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Strategy*, JDN 1–18 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), v.



challenge has been finding the most effective means to achieve identified objectives while competing with peer nation states and coping with irregular threats. “Irregular warfare has been a central component of American warfare throughout history,” and emphasis has ebbed and flowed as the military establishment shifts focus between conventional peer conflict and irregular stabilization activities.<sup>19</sup> This, despite waging the global war on terrorism for the past twenty years. Now as the Joint Force pivots to meet challenges posed by strategic competitors, the focus on irregular conflict is being deemphasized at a time when adversaries have identified United States inflexibility as an Achilles heel.<sup>20</sup>

Strategic Competition is a developing concept designed to stretch limited resources across geopolitical threats. “Population-centric conflicts are irregular warfare contests that are won and lost by controlling and influencing populations rather than occupying territory.”<sup>21</sup> These conflicts exist in a grey area, frequently below the level of armed conflict, and in geographic regions that easily fall outside of immediate national areas of concern. While most instruments of national power are focused on geographic regions of concern, the outlying areas cannot be ignored and must have resources allotted to them to ensure United States competitiveness.

This thesis will explore the development of a Coast Guard operating concept focused on stability as the means for the Joint Force to more effectively address challenges imposed by competition below armed conflict and highlight why the Coast Guard, as a service, is a better fit for this mission than the other military services. The next chapter will look at the literature related to stabilization missions and naval strategy that provide the baseline documents outlining key concepts in these fields.

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<sup>19</sup> Charles T. Cleveland. *The American Way of Irregular War: An Analytical Memoir* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), xiii.

<sup>20</sup> Cleveland, xiii–xiv.

<sup>21</sup> Cleveland, xiv.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Clearly the maritime domain is changing. Global fish stocks are dwindling, the threat of piracy endures, and storms have become more frequent and destructive. As nations confront these challenges, they increasingly look to coast guards . . . and they see our Service, the United States Coast Guard, as a global standard bearer.

—Admiral Karl L. Schultz, Commandant, 2022 State of the Coast Guard<sup>22</sup>

Much of recent stability literature tends to emphasize land-based forces and how western armies transition from air-land battle to activities focused on population centers that reinforce governance, the rule of law, and community needs and activities. These latter activities constitute stability operations that have been refined during conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the military shifted its emphasis to counterterrorism and irregular warfare, joint policies and military publications followed suit with doctrine drafted to assist military services in meeting the challenges posed in the early twenty-first century by the Global War on Terror. Both academic literature and government publications initially focused on policy- and army-centric documents intended to assist in the stabilization of Iraq and Afghanistan. These formed the foundation for later publications emphasizing stability in a maritime environment.<sup>23</sup>

### A. GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

The below publications form a brief overview of government authored documents and policies relating to, or directly impacting, stabilization operations.

The *United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability* was promulgated by the Department of State in partnership with the United States Agency for

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<sup>22</sup> Karl L. Schultz, “2022 State of the U.S. Coast Guard Address,” Maritime Reporter TV, streamed live on February 24, 2022, YouTube video, 59:22, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXCcyLjayDo>.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Marine Corps, forward to *Maritime Stability Operations*, COMDTINST M3120.11 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2012).

International Development, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Treasury.<sup>24</sup> Its goal is to “break the costly cycle of fragility and promote peaceful, self-reliant nations that become United States’ economic and security partners.”<sup>25</sup> To do this, it recommends aligning instruments of national power that include diplomacy, information, military, and economic efforts, to develop and support partners globally and to reinforce the current and accepted rules-based order.<sup>26</sup> This strategy is significant for emphasizing national efforts beyond just those of the Joint Force to address peace and stability in the context of strategic competition. More specifically, it acknowledges that vulnerable and unstable countries directly threaten the United States by hosting, allowing, or enabling transnational threats.<sup>27</sup> Military strategy, in turn, needs to take this into account to maximize efforts that address destabilizing influences that effectively compete with U.S interests.

The recently released *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* outlines United States efforts and commitment in the region.<sup>28</sup> The document begins by addressing the perception of the region’s countries and acknowledging that “Indo-Pacific nations are helping to define the very nature of the international order, and United States’ allies and partners around the world have a stake in its outcomes.”<sup>29</sup> The strategy is focused on strategic competition and the means by which the United States can bolster its allies and partners while expanding partner capacity in the region as a counter-balance to Chinese influence. It specifically cites the Coast Guard as “expanding . . . presence, training, and advising to bolster . . . partner capabilities.”<sup>30</sup> The ideas expressed align directly with concepts discussed in *The United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability*.

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<sup>24</sup> Department of State, *United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability* (Washington, DC: Department of State, 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Department of State, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Department of State, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Department of State, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Executive Office of the President, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022).

<sup>29</sup> Executive Office of the President, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Executive Office of the President, 13.

The DOD Directive 3000.5, *Stabilization*, provides broad guidance from the Secretary of Defense on how the military should write doctrine that prepares forces to meet Irregular War missions related to stability.<sup>31</sup> This document is a cornerstone piece that requires the alignment of joint and military doctrine and training to ensure unity of effort using the military’s instruments of national power. This is significant in its recognition that the Department of Defense is not necessarily the best instrument to lead this mission and creates an opening for services like the Coast Guard, as a member of the Joint Force, to balance Department of Defense and interagency efforts.

The *Joint Doctrine Development Process* outlines the methods by which doctrine is written and fielded within the Joint Force.<sup>32</sup> Its purpose is to “enhance readiness and improve the operational effectiveness of joint forces by providing fundamental principles that guide the development and employment of United States’ military forces toward common objectives.”<sup>33</sup> As a member of the Joint Force, the Coast Guard must align its own doctrine to ensure unity of effort as an instrument of military power. The *Joint Doctrine Development Process* will form the baseline for this thesis by outlining a format for drafting and implementing new doctrine.

Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, provides overarching guidance for “unified action” within the Joint Force.<sup>34</sup> It further refines guidance in the *Joint Doctrine Development Process* and is an overarching instruction to align military service doctrine. Unified action is the “synchronization, coordination, and/or integration of the activities of governmental and nongovernmental entities with military operations to achieve unity of effort.”<sup>35</sup> Joint Force irregular warfare missions, such as

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<sup>31</sup> Department of Defense, *Stabilization*, DOD Directive 3000.05 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018).

<sup>32</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Doctrine Development Process*, CJCSM 5120.01B (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, B-1.

<sup>34</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, JP1 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013), i.

<sup>35</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, GL-12.

stabilization, must align within these goals and efforts, to include Coast Guard doctrine and policy.

Joint Publication 3-07, *Stability*, provides broad guidance for “stability missions, activities, and tasks . . . across the range of military operations.”<sup>36</sup> It identifies the functions and planning efforts to be considered by, and refined within, service doctrine related to specific nested service mission tasking, strategies, and policies.

The U.S. Army Field Manual 3-07, *Stability*, outlines Army tasks and lines of effort related to stabilization missions in the land domain.<sup>37</sup> The Army was the first to produce a stability manual and it subsequently influenced both joint and service level manuals following its first introduction in 2008. Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan drove the Army to develop doctrine in support of missions and efforts related to the Global War on Terror. This document is referenced in Joint and Coast Guard manuals as integral for a baseline understanding of that mission.

The Tri-Service Strategy, *Advantage at Sea*, was authored by a joint working group comprised of representatives from the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard.<sup>38</sup> This strategy replaced the *Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower*, which was the first maritime strategy written in concert with representatives from the three sea services.<sup>39</sup> *Advantage at Sea* balances the services’ strengths to “preserve freedom of the seas, deter aggression, and win wars.”<sup>40</sup> It defines the operating environment through the lens of strategic competition with China and seeks to integrate naval power across domains building upon the strengths of each service to address challenges across the range of military operations. This resulted in the Coast Guard focusing more on strategic

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<sup>36</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Stability*, i.

<sup>37</sup> Department of the Army, *Stability*, FM 3-07 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Coast Guard, *Advantage at Sea* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 2020).

<sup>39</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, Department of the Navy, and U.S. Coast Guard, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Coast Guard, *Advantage at Sea*, ii.

competition and enhancing capabilities and interoperability among allies and partners, while the Navy and Marine Corps focused on full spectrum warfare.

Coast Guard Publication 1, *Doctrine for the U.S. Coast Guard*, broadly outlines the service's role and niche within the Joint Force by articulating the "distinct blend of authorities, capabilities, competencies, and partnerships" it provides to the nation writ large.<sup>41</sup> These unique authorities and capabilities allow the Coast Guard to operate domestically as a law enforcement organization while maintaining the duties and obligations required of it as a military service. It is this "multi-mission character" that makes the Coast Guard suitable for stabilization missions in which it can support allies and partners globally while demonstrating appropriate behavior and the rule of law for other nations and coast guards.<sup>42</sup> Reinforcing the rule of law and enabling civil authority in support of the established rules-based order reflects United States' foreign policy while also preparing the environment for potential military conflict.

Commandant Instruction Manual 3120.11, *Maritime Stability Operations*, is a joint publication developed by the Coast Guard, Navy, and Marine Corps.<sup>43</sup> It takes its lead from both JP 3-07 and FM 3-07, acknowledging the importance of both publications and foundational documents in the development of stability operations. It defines the maritime environment as it relates to stability and also identifies sources of instability ranging from terrorism and transnational crime to natural disasters and environmental destruction.<sup>44</sup> It likewise identifies functional tasks including maritime security and safety, maritime infrastructure and economic stabilization, maritime rule of law, and maritime governance and participation.<sup>45</sup> This thesis looks to expand upon the ideas outlined in *Maritime Stability Operations* and applies them to a service level strategy. Such a strategy would help the USCG to unify service efforts and actions with an operating concept that

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<sup>41</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, *Doctrine for the U.S. Coast Guard*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, 1.

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Marine Corps, *Maritime Stability Operations*, COMDTINST M3120.11. Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Marine Corps, 2-2-2-3.

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Marine Corps, 4-1-4-8.

complements both domestic obligations and international efforts as a member of the Joint Force.

The *Coast Guard Strategic Plan* outlines the Commandant's goals as they pertain to his vision for the future of the service and its role within the Department of Homeland Security and the Joint Force.<sup>46</sup> These service priorities include maximizing readiness, addressing complex maritime challenges, and delivering mission excellence.<sup>47</sup> A Coast Guard operating concept will have to account for these as well as follow-on goals as they influence service culture and practices.

The Coast Guard's *Security Sector Assistance Strategy* provides a vision for "helping foreign partners . . . build sustainable capacity sufficient to address . . . global security challenges."<sup>48</sup> It aligns service efforts behind building partner and allied capacity to address global and regional challenges in partnership with United States' diplomatic efforts. This strategy closely aligns with Department of State efforts and bridges military stabilization efforts with diplomatic engagement, illustrating the softer side of military action and how this can support diplomatic, information and economic instruments of national power.

The *Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing Strategic Outlook* highlights a developing mission within the Coast Guard and Joint Force pertaining to strategic competition.<sup>49</sup> Illegal fishing preys on the inability of some nations to maintain sovereignty in destabilizing regions of their maritime littorals.<sup>50</sup> The overharvesting of regional fish stocks undermines the economic stability of coastal nations and furthers instability among developing nations.<sup>51</sup> The enforcement of illegal fishing is perceived as a means by which to directly compete with the Chinese Communist Party while also enforcing the rule of

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<sup>46</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, *Strategic Plan 2018–2022*.

<sup>47</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, 8.

<sup>48</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, *Security Sector Assistance Strategy* (Washington, DC: U.S. Coast Guard, 2015) 1.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, *Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing*.

<sup>50</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, 2.

<sup>51</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, 10.

law, and maintaining regional stability to reassure allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific. This strategic outlook, along with the preceding documents, form part of the Coast Guard’s Strategy Documents (see Figure 3), which set objectives and tasks that unify service efforts.



Figure 3. USCG Strategy Documents<sup>52</sup>

## B. ACADEMIC LITERATURE

The following publications represent a sampling of recent literature focused on stabilization and/or strategic thought.

*The War for Muddy Waters* by Joshua Tallis analyzes maritime irregular threats using broken windows theory.<sup>53</sup> He explains the challenges in operating in the littorals and how the migration of people towards the coast influences the growth of criminal activity offshore.<sup>54</sup> Tallis also chides what he sees as an inherent tendency in the Navy’s “tailoring

<sup>52</sup> Source: U.S. Coast Guard, “USCG Strategic Documents” (unpublished presentation, 2022).

<sup>53</sup> Joshua Tallis, *The War for Muddy Waters: Pirates, Terrorists, Traffickers, and Maritime Insecurity* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 6.

<sup>54</sup> Tallis, 15.



themselves only for large-scale conflicts” at the expense of regional security.<sup>55</sup> Partly due to the challenges of operating near-shore and partly due to the inherent difficulty of policing littoral areas, a coastal nation’s struggle to assert sovereignty at sea is a security blind-spot largely unexplored by academics. Tallis’s book addresses irregular warfare in the littorals, and he uses case studies in the Caribbean, West Africa, and Southeast Asia to explore challenges related to smuggling, piracy, migration, slave trade, and terrorism. His research includes a discussion of efforts by the Navy and Coast Guard to assert sovereignty at sea. Interestingly though, Tallis urges the Navy to do more to combat asymmetric activity, but uses the Coast Guard to illustrate how this can be done. A stronger argument may have focused on the Coast Guard’s inherent constabulary authorities and nature to argue for their continued and focused efforts on maritime security.

David Kilcullen’s *The Accidental Guerilla* explores the challenges of conventional armies in combatting asymmetric threats.<sup>56</sup> It is part memoir and part treatise documenting lessons gleaned throughout his military career and as an advisor in Iraq and Afghanistan. It focuses on the land domain and how armies adapt to fight insurgencies while also fighting, or being prepared to fight, conventional conflicts. The idea of “fighting a small war in the midst of a big one” exactly parallels the idea of the Coast Guard contributing to stability operations as a complement to the larger Joint Force emphasis on nation-state warfare.<sup>57</sup> The cultural lessons and areas of emphasis are applicable to the larger subject of stability, regardless of domain.

*Counterinsurgency* is another piece by David Kilcullen to emerge from the Global War on Terror.<sup>58</sup> In this book, he focuses on land operations combatting radical Islam and identifies soft power as being most effective at disrupting insurgencies. He asserts that conventional militaries struggle to address the asymmetric challenges posed by insurgency,

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<sup>55</sup> Tallis, 23.

<sup>56</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>57</sup> Kilcullen, Title Page.

<sup>58</sup> David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

which he opines is the most widespread form of warfare.<sup>59</sup> While he focuses on land warfare, information regarding insurgent motivations and environmental factors can also apply to maritime irregular warfare. Kilcullen explains the means by which insurgents undermine established governments and provides recommended approaches to combat them. Supporting civil authority and reinforcing the rule of law are inherent tasks within stability operations that the Coast Guard employs both domestically and abroad.

*A Brief Guide to Maritime Strategy* by James Holmes is a short primer on theories and strategic thoughts related to the maritime domain.<sup>60</sup> The author discusses the role naval strategy plays in global shipping and commerce. He touches upon maritime security issues, fleet construction, commerce security and conventional conflict. Holmes introduces the iconic figures Mahan and Corbett, and places their work in context for non-experts to understand. This book provides an authoritative touchpoint for the theory behind strategic naval power.

Julian Corbett's *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* is a keystone to understanding naval strategic theory and is often read in concert with, and to complement, the ideas of Alfred Thayer Mahan.<sup>61</sup> Rather than focusing on command of the sea and fleet battle, Corbett explores the role navies play in enabling and supporting land conflict and, by extension, diplomacy and foreign policy. He asserts that naval forces are supporting elements to army efforts although conceding "that it is almost impossible that a war can be decided by naval action alone."<sup>62</sup> His depiction of warfare was "joint" nearly a century before the term was coined, and his book provides a broad strategic view of naval warfare as an instrument of national power. As an instrument of national power, naval forces use stability operations to provide maritime security while countering irregular threats and reinforcing civil authority.

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<sup>59</sup> Kilcullen, ix.

<sup>60</sup> James Holmes, *A Brief Guide to Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019).

<sup>61</sup> Julian Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988).

<sup>62</sup> Corbett, 15.

*Savage Wars of Peace* by Max Boot explores the role military police actions played in United States policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>63</sup> He addresses examples of small-scale expeditionary operations in support of limited foreign policy objectives. These operations directly influenced the development of Marine Corps culture and provided valuable experience for the military prior to its entry into World War I. The book provides background on United States involvement in small wars, early efforts to fight unconventionally, and doctrine developed to train future personnel. Boot specifically mentions the *U.S. Marine Corps Small Wars Manual*, last updated in 1940, that was promulgated following Marine involvement in Central American and Caribbean United States force projection in the early twentieth century.<sup>64</sup> The manual is a precursor to the *Low Intensity Conflict Field Manual* written in the 1990s, the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* written in the 2000s, and the *Stability Operations Field Manuals* in use today. Boot portrays the United States military as a slowly evolving and thinking organization, reluctant to adapt to asymmetric threats, but capable of making organizational changes and learning from experience when forced by conflict to do so. This thesis will continue to build upon the need for evolutionary change by exploring the way in which the Coast Guard could meet the challenges posed by asymmetric conflict.

Thomas Hammes's *The Sling and The Stone* looks at the challenges posed by irregular warfare.<sup>65</sup> Written as the United States launched its Global War on Terror, the book was a primer to many practitioners of counterinsurgency in the Global War on Terror. Hammes categorizes asymmetric threats under the term 4th generation warfare and notes that this style of conflict is not suited to conventional U.S. forces and represents a style of conflict that regularly defeats western modeled armies.<sup>66</sup> He defines "fourth-generation warfare [as using] all available networks-political, economic, social, and military-to convince the enemy's political decision makers that their strategic goals are either

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<sup>63</sup> Max Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

<sup>64</sup> Boot, 283.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2004).

<sup>66</sup> Hammes, 14.

unachievable or too costly.”<sup>67</sup> To Hammes, this style of warfare has been evolving for decades and is now the preferred means to combat established military powers.<sup>68</sup> Coast Guard operations in support of domestic and international security initiatives must consider the challenges posed by Hammes as the service plans and conducts missions in support of national objectives.

These academic works focused largely on land-based conflict. Although not specific to the maritime environment, the ideas presented in the above books apply to stability operations in the maritime environment. Research such as this sets the stage for further analysis of the irregular/asymmetric operating environment prevalent in the current geo-political environment and complements government documents, policy manuals, and articles focused on irregular and asymmetric threats. Other categories for source material include government publications and journal articles. This century has provided fertile ground for stability-focused debates within professional journals as well as standardization of practices and procedures within government publications and doctrine.

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<sup>67</sup> Hammes, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Hammes, 4.

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### III. BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Our part in this solution set really focuses on partnerships and collaboration. And when folks I think external to us in the region reflect on the Coast Guard, I think we're a maritime organization with centuries of continuous experience in maritime security, marine safety, and environmental stewardship. And that experience, when it's coupled with our broad authorities, our quite capable platforms, and humans that operate those platforms, and really the international relationships that we are able to tap into and leverage, that allows us to advance maritime security. It best positions us as an organization to promote . . . acceptable maritime behavior amongst regional maritime stakeholders.

—Admiral Karl L. Schultz, Commandant, Department of State  
Teleconference, July 29, 2021<sup>69</sup>

The previous chapter outlined methodology for this thesis. This chapter will identify a doctrinal gap, propose a solution, and list capabilities to execute the proposed solution.<sup>70</sup> It will do so by exploring the expected joint operating environment and through an analysis of service structure and capabilities.

The joint operating environment is a military term used to describe an area in which the United States military may operate as it supports national strategies, diplomacy, and security. The Interim National Security Strategy released by President Biden describes the current joint operating environment as being “at an inflection point” meaning that global dynamics are shifting and changing at an accelerated rate producing a geopolitical environment that challenges United States hegemony and its role as a leader in the world order.<sup>71</sup> To address these challenges, the President calls for a return to basics with a focus on allies and partners, and an emphasis on those unique American values that are universally attractive to a free and democratic peoples. Democracies, though messy in

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<sup>69</sup> Department of State, “Teleconference with Admiral Karl Schultz.”

<sup>70</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Doctrine Development Process*, B-4.

<sup>71</sup> Executive Office of the President, *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* (Washington, DC: White House, 2021), 1.

practice, remain the preferred form of government, from a United States perspective, and are fundamental to “freedom, prosperity, peace, and dignity” globally.<sup>72</sup> The need to reinforce and assure allies and partners requires involvement and support from the Joint Force as one of the instruments of national power capable of deploying globally and visibly to support strategic competition. Adversarial nations employ combinations of military and civil power to expand their influence and to achieve objectives through diplomatic and economic means that often subvert or coerce other nations through disinformation and deception.<sup>73</sup> This is designed to neutralize traditional means of national power and to achieve global dominance without escalating to armed conflict with the United States. For the Joint Force to meet the challenges posed in the current operating environment it must optimize the current force to meet challenges below the threshold of armed conflict while maintaining the ability to “fight and win our nation’s wars.”<sup>74</sup>

The Coast Guard is a member of the Joint Force by virtue of its designation as a military service in Title 14 of the *United States Code*.<sup>75</sup> This code requires the service to

- (1) Enforce . . . all applicable Federal laws on, under, and over the high seas and waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States;
- (2) Engage in maritime air surveillance or interdiction to enforce or assist in the enforcement of the laws of the United States;
- (3) Administer laws and promulgate and enforce regulations for the promotion of safety of life and property on and under the high seas and waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, covering all matters not specifically delegated by law to some other executive department;
- (4) Develop, establish, maintain, and operate, with due regard to the requirements of national defense, aids to maritime navigation, icebreaking facilities, and rescue facilities for the promotion of safety on, under, and

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<sup>72</sup> Executive Office of the President, 2.

<sup>73</sup> Valery Gerasimov, “Contemporary Warfare and Current Issues for the Defense of the Country,” *Military Review*, trans. Harold Orenstein (November–December 2017): 24, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/Contemporary-Warfare-and-Current-Issues-for-the-Defense-of-the-Country.pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> “The Army’s Vision and Strategy,” Department of the Army, accessed April 16, 2022, <https://www.army.mil/about/>.

<sup>75</sup> “14 U.S. Code 101—Establishment of Coast Guard,” Legal Information Institute, accessed April 16, 2022, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/14/101>.

over the high seas and waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States . . . [and] maintain a state of readiness to assist in the defense of the United States.<sup>76</sup>

These broad authorities range from peacetime maritime law enforcement to nation state conflict, making the Coast Guard a unique instrument of national power that has the potential to uniquely contribute to the Joint Force in the strategic competition space.

To account for its unique authorities the United States government has always placed the Coast Guard under a cabinet Secretary outside the authority of the Secretary of Defense and its predecessors the Navy Secretary and the Secretary for War. Its current location within the Department of Homeland Security places it in a position to support the Joint Force while also contributing to domestic security in concert with its sister components within the Department and keeps it outside of the constraints posed by the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878.<sup>77</sup> This Act restricts the use of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Space Force “from participating in civilian law enforcement” thereby preventing the Department of Defense from interfering in the civil affairs of the United States.<sup>78</sup> This Congressional limitation on the Department of Defense requires the Coast Guard to work collaboratively with it through the Joint Staff and its cabinet secretary, the Secretary of Homeland Security. Thus, the Coast Guard collaborates with its sister military services but is not always constrained by the same policies and limitations. This enables the service to work effectively for the Department of Homeland Security, as a law enforcement agency, domestically as well as within the Joint Force in a constabulary focused military capacity. This distinction further reinforces the idea that the Coast Guard is unique and has the ability to operate in strategic competition in a way distinctly different from its sister military services.

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<sup>76</sup> Primary Duties of the Coast Guard, 14 U.S.C. § 2 (2017).

<sup>77</sup> “18 U.S. Code § 1385—Use of Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Space Force as Posse Comitatus,” Legal Information Institute, accessed April 16, 2022, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/1385>.

<sup>78</sup> Joseph Nunn, “The Posse Comitatus Act Explained,” Brennan Center for Justice, October 14, 2021, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/posse-comitatus-act-explained>.



## A. IDENTIFY A DOCTRINAL GAP

Strategic competition requires that the United States maximize the ability to reassure partners and allies, through diplomatic efforts, messaging, and military presence in the competition space. Both U.S. Air Land Battle and Air Sea Battle operations occur when the threats to national interests require a response with force. The use of force is resource intensive in terms of human and capital cost. It is not an activity that is lightly taken by national leadership and is done so with the expectation that the United States military can win such conflicts. This requires the military to maintain a constant state of readiness to support what is generally understood to be a cycle of operational Phases: Phase 0 (Shape); Phase I (Deter); Phase II (Seize Initiative); Phase III (Dominate); Phase IV (Stabilize). Phase V (Enable Civil Authority); and, ultimately a return to Phase 0.<sup>79</sup> The application of this paradigm however, has been called into question in the current era of strategic competition with peer adversaries.<sup>80</sup> The author asserts that it is this challenge which represents a doctrinal gap within the Joint Force literature. The Joint Force needs the means to address strategic competition at the threshold below armed conflict and provide geopolitical stability in support of United States interests.

Joint Publication 3-07, *Stabilization*, identifies three fundamentals of stability. These include conflict transformation, host nation ownership, and unity of effort. While this publication was written to complement other military efforts in a conflict, these fundamentals can and do apply to strategic competition and so can be used as a starting point for a service level strategy focused on operating in the competition space. Conflict transformation “addresses the underlying causes of violent conflict while developing viable, peaceful alternatives for people to meet their needs and pursue their political and socioeconomic aspirations.”<sup>81</sup> This definition works in strategic competition as well as in the range of military operations. Host nation “social, political, and economic institutions” contribute legitimacy to U.S. military operations by providing sustainable support through

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<sup>79</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, JP 3-0 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), V-8.

<sup>80</sup> Daniel Burkhardt and Alison Woody, “Strategic Competition: Beyond Peace and War,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 86 (2017): 21.

<sup>81</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Stability*, I-18.

partnerships.<sup>82</sup> Unity of effort requires a whole-of-government approach to comprehensively employ instruments of national power in the operating environment.<sup>83</sup>

Unity of effort includes established and accepted command and control models, pooled and shared resources, and unified tasks and direction. It is the premise behind the establishment of the Joint Force, the motivation behind the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1989 as well as with the establishment of combatant commands, and joint task forces.<sup>84</sup> Unity of command is critical to achieving tasks and objectives in the operational domain and is therefore vital to strategic competition. Unity of effort's focus on a whole-of-government approach drives the need to look at unique organizational solutions to meet current geopolitical challenges. Correctly balancing the Joint Force to address peacetime competition as well as nation state conflict creates unit of effort amongst the military instruments of power, improving the nation's ability to respond to geopolitical challenges. This concept is reinforced by Figure 4, which shows the effects stabilization activities have in competition by aligning tasks with strategy to create military lines of effort that enable diplomatic settlements achieving unity of effort across national instruments of power.

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<sup>82</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, I-18.

<sup>83</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, I-19–I-20.

<sup>84</sup> Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99–433, 100 Stat. 992 (1986), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/house-bill/3622>.

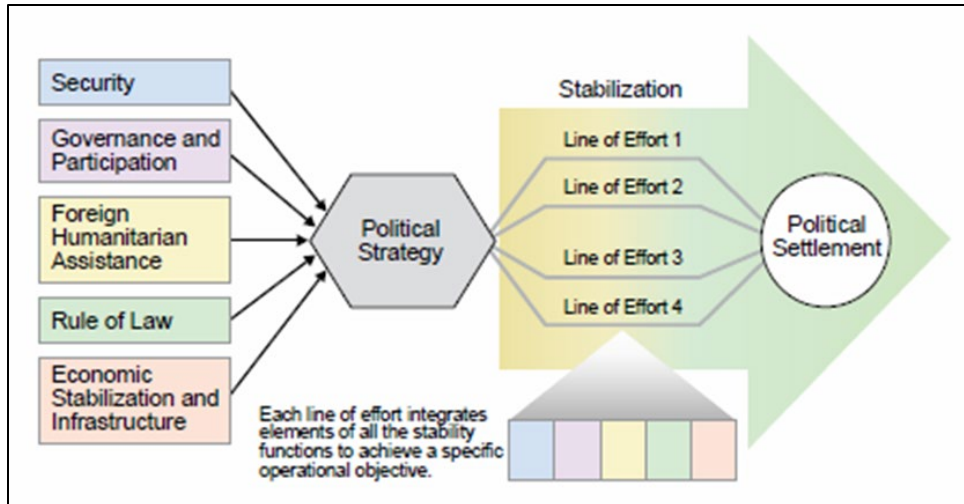


Figure 4. An Integrated Approach to Stabilization<sup>85</sup>

## B. PROPOSE A SOLUTION

The Coast Guard is best poised, within the Joint Force, to focus on reassuring partners and allies by operating at a threshold below armed conflict in strategic competition. Its statutory requirements that involve a constabulary blend of law enforcement and military authorities make it an ideal asset to address maritime stabilization concerns. To pivot the organization in this direction, the Coast Guard should develop a comprehensive operating concept that aligns existing strategies and missions with stabilization fundamentals thereby synchronizing service efforts to both enable and optimize the Joint Force and the Department Homeland Security in strategic competition in the maritime domain. This would hinge on the Coast Guard’s unique capabilities to conduct stabilization operations.

## C. LIST CAPABILITIES TO EXECUTE THE PROPOSED SOLUTION

The Coast Guard characterizes its operational assets as a maritime trident with each prong representing shore-based forces, maritime patrol forces, or deployable specialized forces, as shown in Figure 5.<sup>86</sup> Shore-based forces include sector commands, small boat

<sup>85</sup> Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Stability*. III-2.

<sup>86</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, *Doctrine for the U.S. Coast Guard*, 21–23.

stations, aids-to-navigation teams, marine safety units, and construction and buoy tenders.<sup>87</sup> Shore-based forces execute authorities focused domestically on maritime commerce, marine safety, marine transportation, and ports waterways and coastal security. “Maritime patrol forces are comprised of Coast Guard cutters and aircraft, and their crews.”<sup>88</sup> Maritime patrol force missions and tasks are expeditionary in nature and are focused on maritime patrol, persistent presence, command and control, and underway operations supporting maritime law enforcement and search and rescue. Deployable specialized forces are small expeditionary elements that provide very specific capabilities in support of port security, maritime law enforcement, or marine pollution response. Deployable specialized forces are designed to augment existing capabilities as a temporary complement to the persistent capabilities inherent in the shore based, maritime patrol, and joint forces.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, 22.

<sup>88</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, 22.

<sup>89</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, 23.

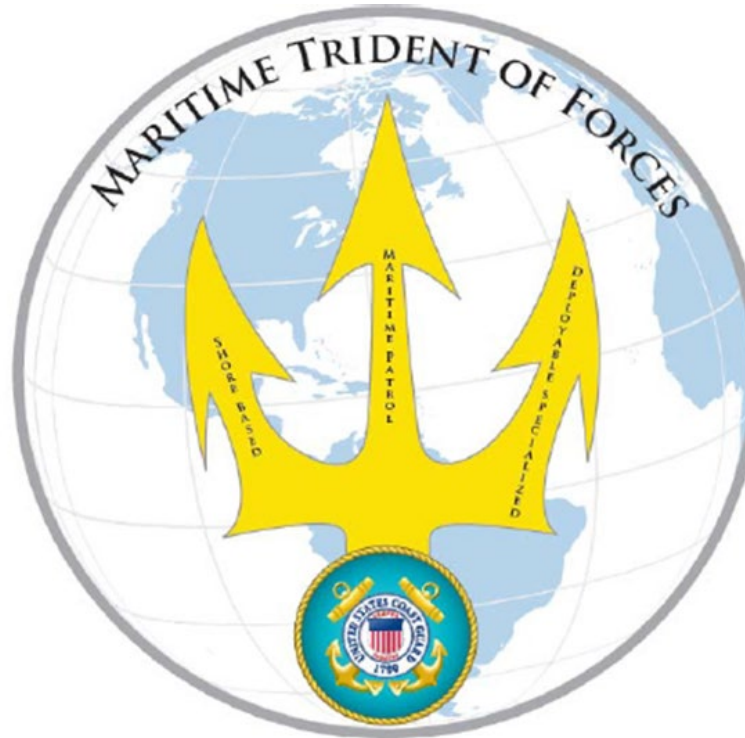


Figure 5. Maritime Trident of Forces<sup>90</sup>

The Coast Guard is organized to meet both domestic and international challenges and is inherently focused on enabling and supporting civil authority and the rule of law, each of which contributes significantly in the context of strategic competition. What is lacking is the overarching service operating concept that creates synergy and unifies the Coast Guard’s disparate communities under an overarching mission. The traditional service idea of a multi-mission, jack-of-all-trades organization is waning as the need to focus on complex geopolitical problems and on developing complementary capability within the Joint Force becomes more apparent in the twenty-first century.<sup>91</sup> The Coast Guard’s missions and tasks are ideally suited for the competition space.

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<sup>90</sup> Source: U.S. Coast Guard, *Operations*, CGP 3-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Coast Guard, 2012), 19.

<sup>91</sup> Jason Smith, “Future Coast Guard: Think Special Operators, Not a Less Capable Navy,” *Real Clear Defense*, May 27, 2021, [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2021/05/27/future\\_coast\\_guard\\_think\\_special\\_operators\\_not\\_a\\_less\\_capable\\_navy\\_779029.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2021/05/27/future_coast_guard_think_special_operators_not_a_less_capable_navy_779029.html).

The maritime safety and security mission supports coastal state sovereignty. It is critical to “achieving a secure and safe maritime environment.”<sup>92</sup> Tasks include aiding distressed mariners, antipiracy operations, arms control, maritime counterterrorism, enforcement of exclusion zones, vessel escorts, foreign internal defense, security force assistance, freedom of navigation and maritime interception operations, among others. These tasks are intended to reinforce international law and, when used to aid international partners, they reinforce the established rules-based order and civil authority.

An example of how the Coast Guard does this effectively overseas is its employment of the patrol forces concept. Patrol Forces Southwest Asia was established early in the Iraq War and is comprised of six patrol boats, a maritime engagement and training team, and a command-and-control structure that provides oversight to operational units as well as Coast Guard expertise to Naval Forces Central Command/Fifth Fleet.<sup>93</sup> It is a construct that is adaptive in nature and can deploy forces as needed to meet a given mission. It is the only Coast Guard command whose commander wears the title of Commodore. While only currently deployed in the Arabian Gulf, the Coast Guard could choose to develop similar forces in support of objectives and tasks in Central America, Southeast Asia, Oceania, and West Africa. The patrol forces concept is similar to the global fleet stations idea proposed by the Navy that led to advanced forward staging bases to provide persistent presence in support of regional stability.<sup>94</sup>

The foreign humanitarian assistance mission includes the above tasks and adds search and rescue, illegal, unregulated, unreported fishing enforcement, and border security.<sup>95</sup> It is focused on enabling partners and allies to respond to challenges in their maritime domain. Foreign humanitarian assistance directly supports diplomatic activities

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<sup>92</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Marine Corps, *Maritime Stability Operations*, 4–1.

<sup>93</sup> “Patrol Forces Southwest Asia,” U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area, accessed April 16, 2022, <https://www.atlanticarea.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Area-Units/PATFORSWA/>.

<sup>94</sup> Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, “Global Fleet Stations . . . Persistent Presence Providing Regional Stability” (presentation, All Flag Officer Training Symposium, Washington, DC, April 24, 2007).

<sup>95</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Marine Corps, *Maritime Stability Operations*, 4–6.

and efforts to assist partner nations in times of crisis. This is critical in reassuring allies and partners, while visibly asserting the viability of the established rule of law.

In 2020 and 2021, the Coast Guard released a strategic outlook and implementation plan focused on illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. The document recognizes that “not all maritime nations have the capability to surveil their sovereign waters or the moral conscience to police their fleets; this lack of shared responsibility creates opportunities for exploitation” by nations who take advantage of the lack of enforcement to over harvest protein stocks.<sup>96</sup> Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing now represents a more pervasive threat to global maritime security than piracy.<sup>97</sup> The Coast Guard seeks to be a model of enforcement while also assisting allies and partners develop their own capabilities in sovereign coastal waters.

Maritime infrastructure and economic stabilization focus on improving maritime economies and governance. It tends to not be military in nature and includes tasks oriented towards consequence management, salvage, and repair of maritime infrastructure.<sup>98</sup> Consequence management translates into emergency planning and, in the United States, specifically into the Integrated Command System. Coast Guard statutory missions related to maritime regulations, pollution prevention and clean-up, as well as maintenance of aids to navigation nest under maritime infrastructure and economic stabilization.

The Coast Guard National Strike Teams are deployable units that respond globally to hazardous material spills. These teams specialize in using the Integrated Command System and are recognized as experts in oil spill clean-up; lightering; and chemical, biological, and radiological monitoring and detection.<sup>99</sup> They are a public-facing part of the service and respond globally throughout the year to incidents upon receiving requests from state and national governments.

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<sup>96</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, *Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing*, 2.

<sup>97</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, 2.

<sup>98</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Marine Corps, *Maritime Stability Operations*, 4–7.

<sup>99</sup> “USCG National Strike Force (NSF),” Federal Emergency Management Agency, accessed April 16, 2022, [https://emilms.fema.gov/is\\_1190/groups/82.html#:~:text=The%20USCG%20National%20Strike%20Force, and%20the%203%20Strike%20Teams](https://emilms.fema.gov/is_1190/groups/82.html#:~:text=The%20USCG%20National%20Strike%20Force, and%20the%203%20Strike%20Teams).

The maritime rule of law mission projects nation-state sovereignty across coastal state jurisdictions. Tasks include visit board search and seizure, countering illicit trafficking and piracy.<sup>100</sup> These tasks form the core of what the Coast Guard terms maritime law enforcement. Admiralty law is based on international law, accepted norms, and traditions. It is complex and mariners historically tend to be very individualistic in creating a challenging environment for enforcement.

Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachments were created in the 1980s to expand the service's ability to interdict narcotics. These small teams deployed aboard Navy ships providing Coast Guard authorities from Department of Defense Platforms and establishing persistent presence in the transit corridors. Overtime, missions and capabilities have been added to Law Enforcement Detachments but their core focus on nimble and fast deployments remains. Today they train host nation personnel in interdiction techniques, at-sea-space accountability, and maritime law while also remaining on call to deploy globally to meet Coast Guard or national objectives.

The maritime governance and participation missions “focus on those aspects of governance that impact the seas, bays, estuaries, rivers, and ports” in support of coastal state governance.<sup>101</sup> Tasks are administrative in nature and include commercial port improvement, fisheries management, waterways management, intelligence and communications support, and training. These are the day-to-day activities that establish persistent capabilities, maintain maritime domain awareness, and reassure citizens while reinforcing civil authority.

The Coast Guard's Security Sector Assistance Strategy was written in 2015 and is implemented by the Deputy Commandant for Operations – Office of International Affairs and Foreign Policy. Its focus is to help “foreign partners build sustainable capacity sufficient to address today's global security challenges.”<sup>102</sup> This gets to the heart of strategic competition. It is about working with allies and partners collaboratively,

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<sup>100</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Marine Corps, *Maritime Stability Operations*, 4–8.

<sup>101</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Marine Corps, 4–9.

<sup>102</sup> U.S. Coast Guard, *Security Sector Assistance Strategy*, ii.



reassuring them in times of strife, and ensuring capability and capacity to meet the myriad of today's global challenges.

Coast Guard missions, tasks, capabilities, and mission-specific strategies all focus on the competition space. This is the advantage of constabulary forces that bridge the role of law enforcement and military: organizations capable of reassuring the public while also providing assistance in periods of conflict. At a time when the nation is seeking to address new and developing challenges, the 232-year-old Coast Guard is poised to take the lead in reassuring partners and allies while reinforcing the rule-of-law, leading by example in meeting the challenges of strategic competition.

The defined doctrinal gap, proposed solution, and capabilities necessary to execute it are followed in the next chapter by the scoped solution and command and control considerations regarding the development of a Coast Guard operating concept focused on stabilization.

## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Our broad authorities, multi-mission capabilities, and suite of international agreements with partner nations and allies make the U.S. Coast Guard a “preferred partner” to strengthen the United States Government’s multi and bilateral relationships in key regions. Our Coast Guard presence in these areas influences maritime security, and I note that with maritime commerce underpinning the global marketplace against the backdrop of an increasingly complex threat-scape, maritime security is in fact national security!

—Admiral Karl L. Schultz, Commandant, 2021 State of the Coast Guard<sup>103</sup>

The Coast Guard needs an overarching operating concept that focuses the service, synergizes its missions, and addresses the global challenges posed by strategic competition. This operating concept should encompass all the Coast Guards statutory requirements, while also addressing existing force structure, culture, and service challenges. It should complement existing national strategies as well as *Advantage at Sea* while also incorporating guidance laid out in the Coast Guard’s mission specific strategies and strategic outlooks. Fortunately, examples of such operating concepts can already be found in our sister military services. This chapter will use the Army’s and Marine Corps’ operating concepts as examples to scope a similar Coast Guard document while also addressing command relationships impacted by the development of such a strategy.

### A. SCOPE THE SOLUTION

Both the Army and the Marine Corps regularly develop service level operating concepts that focus on identifying changing operational environments and potential organizational changes to address them. *The Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex*

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<sup>103</sup> Karl L. Schultz, “State of the Coast Guard 2021 Address,” Defense Media Network, March 16, 2021, YouTube video, 59:02, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3UJGMM152Y>.

*World*,<sup>104</sup> and the Marine Corps *Concept for Stand-in Forces*,<sup>105</sup> each represent an ideal model for the Coast Guard to use in the development of such a service level document.

*The Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* was released in 2014. It is a short, readable document that “describes how future Army forces will prevent conflict, shape security environments, and win wars while operating as part of our Joint Force and working with multiple partners.”<sup>106</sup> It aligns with service culture and values, making it easily digestible and understood by Army soldiers and leaders. Most importantly *The Army Operating Concept* provides the Chief of Staff of the Army’s vision of what the service needs to do to operate effectively within the current geo-political environment. This commander’s intent is vital as it enables military planning, equipment acquisition, and alignment of subordinate headquarters under a unifying vision. The document is read and taught throughout the Army University system and is also incorporated into accession point school houses enabling the service to build consensus around the vision creating synergy behind the Chief of Staff of the Army’s vision.

The Marine Corps’ *A Concept for Stand-in Forces* is the Commandant of the Marine Corp’s vision of the service’s role in future conflict. It is a complete reassessment of the service that, while aligning with culture, calls for a streamlining of efforts to make the force lighter and more lethal, expeditionary in focus, and capable of operating with limited support for prolonged periods of time as a leave-behind force. It describes a force that is “positioned forward, shoulder-to-shoulder with our allies and partners, leveraging all-domain tools as the eyes and ears of the fleet and joint force.”<sup>107</sup> *A Concept for Stand-in Forces* illustrates the Commandant’s intent to pull the Marine Corps back into its expeditionary role after twenty years of ground-conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq. Readers quickly learn and understand the commander’s intent as well as how the Marine Corps intends to adapt and change to meet growing geopolitical threats.

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<sup>104</sup> Department of the Army, *The Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2014).

<sup>105</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, *A Concept for Stand-in Forces* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, 2021).

<sup>106</sup> Department of the Army, *The Army Operating Concept*, i.

<sup>107</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, *A Concept for Stand-in Forces*, ii.

A Coast Guard Operating Concept should, similarly, provide the Commandant of the Coast Guard's vision for the force as well as the commander's intent. It should account for the current and future composition of the force, as the Coast Guard recapitalizes its cutters, and pursues recently drafted mission strategies and strategic intents. Most importantly, a Coast Guard Operating Concept should embrace and shape the service culture aligning it with the nation's needs and the nature of current and anticipated Coast Guard missions. Stabilization, a Joint Force mission, provides the vehicle by which to do this. Stabilization missions fall below the threshold of full spectrum conflict, are focused on enabling allies and partners, and require close collaboration with civil authority. The Coast Guard does this daily. Its domestic obligations align under this mission set because it also provides the service with experience working among and with the civil population. The Coast Guard's twelve statutory missions likewise align and complement the objectives of stability. The Coast Guard was created in 1790 as the Revenue Marine, in part, to stabilize the newly formed United States of America. Its initial charter was to sail offshore and enforce the collection of revenue by asserting maritime sovereignty, establishing maritime domain awareness, and hindering the rampant coastal smuggling that threatened to undermine the new nation's rule of law. Hence, stabilization has been inherent within the service since its beginning. The creation of a Coast Guard operating concept centered on stabilization would create a role for the service within the Joint Force centered on strategic competition and on enabling the other military services to continue their focus on deterrence, defense, and when necessary on nation-state conflict.

**B. OFFER RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS REQUIRED BY IMPLEMENTING THE PROPOSED PROCESS**

Command relationships within the Joint Force are well established and are intended to maintain unity of effort through unity of command. The development of a Coast Guard Operating Concept would not alter these, rather it would better define the service's role within the Joint Force by identifying a concrete mission and capability the nation could rely upon in strategic competition. The Tri-Service Strategy, *Advantage at Sea*, forms a notional construct under which the operating concept would need to nest, as do the national

security, national defense, and national military strategies; however, an operating concept focused on stabilization and meeting the challenges of strategic competition aligns with the objectives in these documents. The initiative to produce a new operating concept lies with the Coast Guard.

Figure 6 shows the required unity of effort across government and society within the security sector. Coast Guard capabilities and authorities place it in the middle of these circles highlighting the potential value and impact the service can have on stabilizing an operating environment.

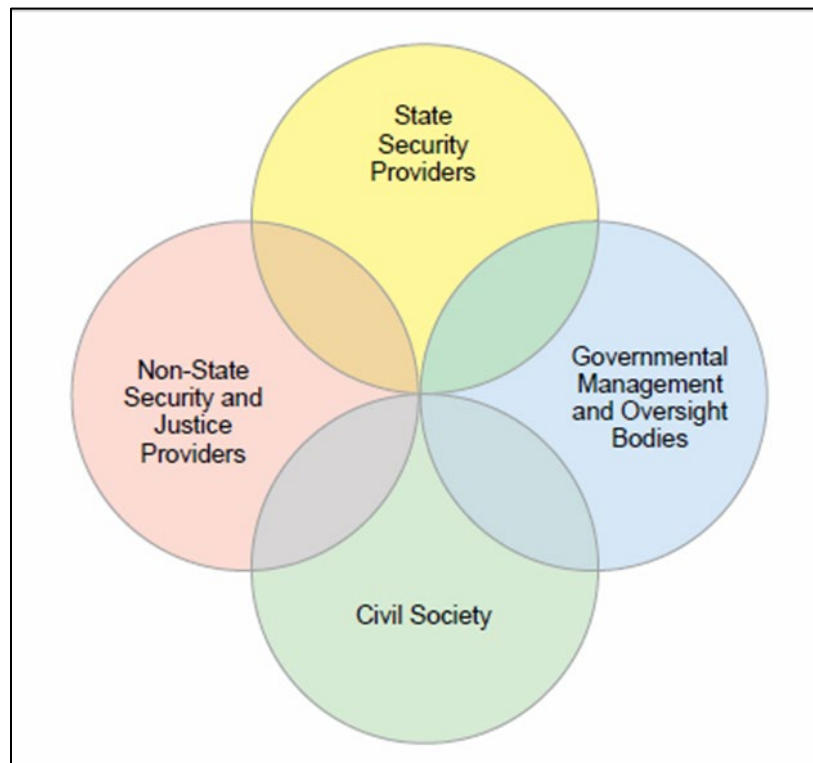


Figure 6. Actors within the Security Sector<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Stability*, C-1.

## V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Transformational change in the maritime domain, and its blistering pace, is not confined to the United States – rather, it is global! These changes take place in coastal waters act as a forcing mechanism, compelling coastal nations worldwide to establish or bolster their own coast guards, and to adapt or expand their existing maritime security capabilities. For it is “Coast Guard work” to ensure safety of life at sea, to protect maritime environments, to promote economic prosperity, and to generally maintain “good order and governance” in waters of coastal state jurisdiction.

—Admiral Karl L. Schultz, Commandant, 2022 State of the Coast Guard<sup>109</sup>

An operating concept focused on addressing strategic competition at the threshold below armed conflict aligns mission strategies, strategic outlooks, statutory missions, and service culture under a broad Joint Force mission, carving out a role and niche within the larger Joint Force while also formalizing the Coast Guard’s role in supporting national strategy. A short, readable document complimentary to *Advantage at Sea*, and similar in style to *The Army’s Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* would convey a strategic vision and the Coast Guard Commandant’s intent to both the service and the nation. It is time for the Coast Guard to formalize its relationship within the Joint Force and its role in synergizing military efforts and unity of force in strategic competition below armed conflict. Doing so provides no change to existing doctrine and policies, aligns with strategic intent, and critically fills an existing gap in the United States approach to strategic competition. Fully resourcing such a document will require comprehensive work by the Coast Guard staff to ensure that the many missions and communities within the service are properly aligned under stabilization.

Opportunities for further study include a deeper analysis of the Coast Guard Commandant’s role in supporting the Joint Chiefs of Staff. While not a permanent member of the Joint Chiefs, the Coast Guard Commandant regularly participates in service chief

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<sup>109</sup> Schultz, “2022 State of the U.S. Coast Guard Address.”

meetings that address the future role of the Joint Force by providing a Coast Guard perspective.

Opportunities for further study also include an exploration of the nexus between law enforcement and the military. Past and future challenges in irregular conflict will continue to focus on population-centric regions where civil law, society, and local governments need reinforcement. Militaries are not always the best solution for tackling these challenges, and there is a role for law enforcement elements within the greater homeland security enterprise to contribute. What this looks like in practice is fertile ground for a future thesis.

Strategic competition with nation states below the level of armed conflict is a strategic reality for the foreseeable future. The United States cannot afford for its Joint Force to cede the knowledge gained in irregular conflict during the Global War on Terror in favor of a renewed focus on nation-state conflict ala Air Land Battle and Air Sea Battle. Visionary change is needed to align the military services so that the nation can continue to address asymmetric threats, such as stabilization, as well as conventional threats by providing both deterrence against nation-state warfare as well as capabilities necessary to protect national interests globally. The Coast Guard, if it chooses to be, could play a key role in addressing the nation's security concerns while enabling diplomatic objectives related to strategic competition in the maritime domain.

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