



OCOM

The United States Needs an Oceanic Command

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Abstract: This article argues that the current poor state of the U.S. Navy reflects a larger problem: the lack of a global maritime security portfolio in the United States' defense schema. It examines the example of Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King's organizational and strategic leadership atop the U.S. Navy during World War II as providing both context and a way ahead toward a more unified approach to maritime strategy. A key finding in the article focuses on the problem of unified (formerly geographic) combatant commands (COCOMs) in the current U.S. security architecture. By dividing maritime strategy into "demand signals" from the continentally focused COCOMs, such

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as the U.S. Central Command and U.S. European Command, the Unified Command Plan has removed, decentralized, and deunified a global way of thinking about maritime strategy. This article proposes to ameliorate the problem by creating an Oceanic Command, much as Admiral King was commander in chief of the U.S. Fleet during World War II. The author further argues that there is already organizational precedent for the shift with the existence of both the U.S. Space Command and the U.S. Strategic Command.

Keywords: Oceanic Command, combatant command, Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, World War II, Unified Command Plan

No single agency has the responsibility, authority, and perspective both to develop and to execute the country's maritime strategy.

~ Captain Robert C. Rubel, USN (Ret)¹

The abuse of the U.S. Navy fleet by the U.S. combatant commands (COCOMs) must end.² This article proposes that Congress pass legislation amending the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act by creating a new combatant command within the Unified Command Plan with a global charter for maritime power: the U.S. Oceanic Command (OCOM). This might sound like a drastic solution to the U.S. Navy's many current malaises, but the past provides precedent for a solution to revitalize American seapower.³ It also accounts for the extreme difficulty of imposing other solutions that sound good on paper but run afoul of the budget and political realities of the current national security paradigm.

COCOMs Are Part of the Problem

Recently, when explaining the 2017 collisions of the guided missile destroyers USS *Fitzgerald* (DDG 62) and USS *McCain* (DDG 56), Vice Admiral Roy I. Kitchener, at the time the commander of the U.S. Fleet Forces Command, said that “it’s primarily about four things. . . . [Number one] is operational tempo [optempo] versus readiness generation. Those two were in conflict and out of balance, and the balance tipped toward the operational demand.”⁴ That operational demand comes from a decentralized system of regional COCOMs that lust for seapower. Foremost among the Navy’s missions in recent history were sorties from aircraft carriers during the Global War on Terrorism and contingency operations, on-station submarine and surface ships with Tomahawk cruise missile strike capability, and overseas ballistic missile defense requirements for AEGIS platforms armed with SM-3 missiles. These responsibilities resulted in an unsustainable global presence as the force degraded over time without significant recapitalization of the fleet.

Take, for example, the deployment of the USS *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN 72) carrier strike group (CSG) in 2022. First, to what purpose was this CSG deployed for seven months? There was no major maritime war anywhere in the world at the time, yet the CSG deployed for an excessive amount of time in the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions to satisfy the insatiable demands of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) and U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). The COCOMs tasked—and the Navy leadership acquiesced—to operational demand. This process involved other COCOMs, such as the U.S. Northern Command, in directing naval forces under their operational control to deploy to places such as the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea. Oversight for this process involves the U.S. secretary of defense. The missions that the *Abraham*

Lincoln CSG conducted included “deterrence and presence operations and multinational exercises, including maritime security operations, integrated training between surface and air units, long-range maritime strike, anti-submarine warfare, information warfare operations, maritime interdiction operations, personnel recovery, air defense operations, multiple ship navigation, formation maneuvering and refueling-at-sea operations.”⁵ The long-range maritime strike mission implies that some combat or over-the-horizon delivery of ordnance was involved, perhaps in the Arabian Sea or the Persian Gulf. However, this kind of vague requirement has been common when deployment lengths were shorter and COCOMs did not set the “demand signal” for ship tour lengths. Anecdotally, the only time that this author deployed beyond six months in his 23-year Navy career was during the Gulf War (Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm). His other four aircraft carrier cruises were six months or less in duration and encompassed combat operations in the Adriatic Sea (Operation Deliberate Force) and the Persian Gulf (Operation Southern Watch).⁶

What changed? The COCOMs came to rule the Navy’s operational schedule and the Navy had a hard time saying “no” due to its fears of losing budget share for not contributing, especially after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, on 11 September 2001. Retired Navy officers Peter D. Haynes and Steven T. Wills discuss this dynamic resulting first from the Goldwater-Nichols Act and then from U.S. Army general Colin L. Powell’s “Base Force” restructuring of the U.S. military after Operation Desert Storm that significantly reduced the size of the Navy.⁷ Nevertheless, the six-month limit on overseas naval deployments remained in place except during the most exceptional circumstances. The

Global War on Terrorism made the Navy even more reticent to challenge COCOM requests, even though the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq had no absolute requirement for surged surface and aircraft forces beyond the “ops normal” tempo of the late Cold War and the 1990s. In short, there were airbases aplenty on land, but it was more convenient to use ships. Worn-out ships and sailors became the predictable result, and this was happening during a period in which the Navy was further downsizing its overall active duty force and sending thousands of sailors every year as individual augmentees to support land forces ashore in critical billets that the Army had divested in the 1990s, such as electronic warfare.⁸ The Navy’s only means to prevent these actions was to plead for delayed and overdue intermediate and major shipyard periods, though this had the perverse effect of making fewer ships liable for undiminished COCOM requests, which led to an even higher operational tempo as time went on. For example, the *Abraham Lincoln* in 2002–3 conducted the first 11-month cruise for an aircraft carrier group since the Iran hostage crisis in the late 1970s.⁹

Historical Precedent and Context

World War II provides historical precedent and context to test the idea of establishing an OCOM. First, one must understand that before the war the three four-star admiral commands in the Navy were separate. These were the Commander in Chief, United States Fleet (CINCUS); the Commander in Chief, Asiatic Fleet; and the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), who resided ashore in the old Army Navy building in Washington, DC (not far from the Vietnam War Memorial and Constitution Hall).¹⁰ At this time, the CNO was not the Service chief per se, but atop a Navy whose unity of command came from the

secretary of the Navy and ultimately the president. CINCUS reported to these officials, not the CNO. President Franklin D. Roosevelt made it clear in his speeches and conversations that he was the “Commander in Chief of the Navy.”¹¹ However, his relationship with his admirals soon changed.

Prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Admiral Harold R. Stark served as CNO and Admiral James O. Richardson served as CINCUS. After war broke out in Europe in 1939, a new Atlantic Fleet was created, and CINCUS became a dual-hatted command operationally focused on the Pacific Fleet, where the bulk of the fleet resided, but retaining overall command. With the assignment of Ernest J. King to Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet (CINCLANT) in late 1940, it was not long before he was upgraded to four stars as an oceanic fleet commander. The attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and the subsequent entry of the United States into the war served as the catalyst that resulted in King becoming CINCUS as well as CINCLANT and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz becoming Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC). King soon replaced the odd-sounding CINCUS acronym (which was pronounced “sink us”) with COMINCH, which had been previously used in World War I by Admiral Henry T. Mayo, under whom King served as a staff officer.¹² In 1942, President Roosevelt unified the entire Navy under King, replacing Stark with King as CNO while retaining his title of COMINCH. By so doing, Roosevelt made King the most powerful admiral to *ever* exercise authority in wartime. King’s conduct of global maritime operations was unmatched, and even his critics acknowledged as much. He possessed a global vision and the existing organizational structure to make his unity of command work effectively under the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) for a global maritime conflict.¹³ As such, King served on the U.S. Joint Chiefs of

Staff (JCS) and the CCS alongside his American and British land and air counterparts. It was at the level of the JCS/CCS that Roosevelt added another four-star admiral, William D. Leahy, but Leahy had no authority over the operations of the U.S. Fleet and instead operated at the major or grand strategic level, in effect as a forerunner of the chairman of the JCS.¹⁴

It is worth examining what King did from an organizational and structural perspective. In late 1940, King, a vice admiral qualified in all three major naval warfare “tribes” (surface-battleship, submarines, and aviation) was moved from his position as a member of the General Board of the Navy. The CNO, Admiral Stark, had stashed King at the General Board not only to provide his key input to this most important advisory body to Secretary of the Navy W. Frank Knox but also to be available should the United States become more involved in the spreading global conflict in Europe and Asia.¹⁵ As the Navy’s undeclared war with German submarines began to heat up in the Atlantic, Stark moved King to command the newly upgraded Atlantic Squadron, which soon became the Atlantic Fleet, and King received his fourth star as a fleet commander. The unity that foreshadows the OCOM arrangement proposed in this article came for King in March 1942, when President Roosevelt placed him in command of the entire fleet, recreating the position of CINCUS with King in strategic command (called operational command today) of the Navy’s two major fleets, Atlantic and Pacific. King retained command of the Atlantic Fleet, while Admiral Nimitz commanded the Pacific Fleet.¹⁶

As the war progressed, King further organized the Navy’s two major fleets into subcomponents that became numbered fleets. In the Pacific, there were the Third, Fifth, and Seventh Fleets, and in the Atlantic there emerged

the Tenth Fleet (which controlled operations against the German submarine menace) as well as the Second, Fourth, Eighth, and Twelfth Fleets.¹⁷ This system lasted through the end of the Cold War, with the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets holding sway over the numbered fleets. The Pacific Fleet is still in place today, while the Atlantic Fleet as a superior headquarters to numbered fleets was disestablished after the Cold War ended, as eventually was the Second (North Atlantic) Fleet. With the reemergence of the Russian naval threat to the United States, the U.S. Fleet Forces Command was stood up and functionally resembles the former Atlantic Fleet. The Second Fleet has also been reestablished.¹⁸

Critics of an OCOM establishment today will probably reference the problem of span of control over such a wide array of diverse forces. *Span of control* refers to a concept of command and control in which leaders can become overwhelmed by having too many units under their control, despite such control providing the military principle of unity of command.¹⁹ King accomplished this unity with command and control technology far inferior to what exists today for a fleet of warships at least 200 times larger than the present U.S. Navy.²⁰ In other words, this problem is both technologically smaller and easier to address today than it was during World War II. King also ameliorated this issue by decentralizing power and authority to his subordinates. In the Pacific, Nimitz made most of the decisions, with King monitoring them and intervening less after the first year of the war. King practiced the time-honored Navy tradition of centralized planning and decentralized command, as did most of his subordinates—especially Nimitz, whose theater and command were the largest and represented a microcosm of King's approach.²¹ King and his subordinates oversaw the creation of the

numbered fleets within the Pacific and Atlantic Fleets. Although King commanded the Tenth Fleet as well—another “hat” in Navy vernacular—he placed this fleet under his deputy’s command, Vice Admiral Allan R. McCann, for the last half of the war in the Atlantic against German submarines.²²

King was greatly aided by the fact that he succeeded Admiral Stark as CNO in 1942, which gave him de facto unity of command administratively as well as operationally. He kept well informed, but managing such a huge system of bureaucracies and operational forces would not work for a micromanager. King also expanded the CNO’s staff (the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, or OPNAV) to facilitate support to the operational fleets and to provide an additional level of planning at the top. These plans, as approved by King, were integrated into grand strategy during the war via the CCS.²³ In other words, the proof that King made this work is that it did work—and it worked well. This takes nothing away from King’s talented subordinates, including Admirals Nimitz, William F. Halsey Jr., Raymond A. Spruance, McCann, and H. Kent Hewitt. In the cases of Nimitz and Halsey, both also acted as theater (or, in today’s terminology, Joint) commanders, Nimitz in the Central Pacific and Halsey in the South Pacific.²⁴ Even though these portfolios may seem similar to today’s COCOMS, in World War II the Navy’s fleet—that is, the warships—was still ultimately controlled by King, especially for anything having to do with blue-water missions.²⁵ The United States won the war at sea in World War II with this structure, and in no small part due to King’s steady hand at the tiller of global maritime strategy for the interests of his nation.

King proved that a global maritime command in the most complex of environments—war—can work. The “King system” consisted of a global

maritime command organized into two additional maritime echelons: geographic super fleets (Atlantic and Pacific) and under them smaller numbered fleets. Prior to 1947, this system concentrated the control and operations of these fleets under the CNO and OPNAV. After the creation of the U.S. secretary of defense and Department of Defense (DOD) in 1947 and the partial establishment of a unified structure, the King system slowly eroded, although it enjoyed a brief period of resurgence during the Korean War (1950–53), when maritime power was needed to prevail, and benefitted from strong leadership under Admiral Arleigh A. Burke from 1955 to 1961.²⁶

As noted, the end of the Cold War in 1989–91 saw what remained of the King system fall away, no longer required in a unipolar world dominated by peace and the maintenance of a beneficial “new world order” by the United States, its allies, and its partners. Some of the Navy’s numbered fleets survived, and even some former ones were reestablished, such as the Fifth Fleet (in CENTCOM, although not with any major standing forces). But others went away, in particular in the Atlantic, where peace seemed most settled. With the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the Navy also lost the ability to unify global maritime strategy within OPNAV to the enhanced Joint construct and therefore to the geographic COCOMs. The numbered fleets became the playthings of the COCOM commanders, and at the secretary of defense level there was no analog to either King’s approach or to what remained of that approach under the CNO and OPNAV.²⁷

But the patterns of history have a way of recurring. A more dangerous world emerged while the United States focused on the (nonmaritime) Global War on Terrorism. Russia under President Vladimir Putin has become overtly—and violently—revisionist. At the same time, China has turned from

competitive partnership toward challenging international norms, stealing technology and engaging in cyberattacks. China is allied to Russia in every way but name. Additionally, old nemeses of the United States such as Iran and North Korea overtly undermine the global system and currently support Russia openly in its war to subjugate Ukraine. A new cold war has begun, one that not only features a global rather than a regional approach but also relies heavily on maritime supremacy to enable an American-Western global strategy.²⁸ The latest update to what passes for a maritime strategy by the CNO articulates these major points, but the CNO's hands, and those of OPNAV, are tied by the institutional and organizational frameworks in place that make both the creation and execution of global maritime strategy problematic.²⁹ These efforts are furthered hampered by the current weakness of the U.S. maritime Services.³⁰

Existing Precedents: If You Can't Beat 'Em, Join 'Em

Not all COCOMs are focused on continental geography. The U.S. Space Command (SPACECOM), U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM) deal with either a specified task (and used to be known as "specified commands") or another domain (in this case exoatmospheric space). These functional COCOMs provide clear templates for developing a solution to the problems of global maritime strategy. Instead of trying to achieve the impossible, the geographic COCOMs that cause regional strategy to trump global strategy need to be disciplined and educated. At the same time, a specifically maritime COCOM is needed for the oceanic areas, as in the case of the unified commands such as STRATCOM. This new command would

be responsible for the global oceanic commons and called U.S. Oceanic Command (OCOM). STRATCOM, a command whose domain encompasses the delivery of nuclear weapons via the mediums of air, sea (from submarines), and space, focuses on strategic effects. OCOM would focus on the effects of seapower via the maritime domain. The other COCOMs must coordinate with STRATCOM when using its assets, which consist of bomber wings, ballistic missile batteries, and nuclear-powered missile submarines, among other things. The same would be true for OCOM.

One might ask if OCOM would still be subordinated in practice, if not by statute, to the will of geographic COCOMs. The mechanism for adjudication varies, but using STRATCOM's nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) as an example is illustrative. STRATCOM determines the need for its assets based on existing strategic plans—in the case of naval assets, how SSBNs are applied as a resource for nuclear deterrence or thermonuclear war. For example, INDOPACOM learns of an SSBN deployment. It decides that it wants to use the SSBN against Chinese merchant vessels with its Mark-48 Advanced Capability torpedoes. INDOPACOM can ask STRATCOM to provide operational control on a not-to-interfere basis with the SSBN's primary strategic missions. STRATCOM can say yes or no. It certainly would not give INDOPACOM operational control if that meant that the submarine would be tasked away from its special station for its primary mission. If INDOPACOM does not like STRATCOM's answer, it does have the ability to raise the issue “up the chain,” which means going to the secretary of defense for adjudication. It seems unlikely that the secretary, once presented with the priorities, would overrule STRATCOM.

One could imagine the same sort of scenario with an OCOM. For example, a Chinese surface action group is at large in the South China Sea, sinking the ships of U.S. allies and partners, and a CSG is tasked to find it and engage. At the same time, CENTCOM wants a show of force in the Persian Gulf against Iran with an aircraft carrier so its staff officers do not have to figure out the bed-down for an Air Force expeditionary wing. Who wins that one? Reasonable people would leave the decision to OCOM, which would prioritize a blue-water combat mission over a show of force. If CENTCOM is not happy with the decision, the four-star commander can appeal to the secretary of defense. The secretary, or the president, can consult the chairman of the JSC, per the Goldwater-Nichols Act, but they are not bound by what advice is given. However, the U.S. defense community has grown so used to the autonomy of the geographic COCOMs that leaders have come to believe that they must satisfy their requests. But COCOMs are regional, not global, in their outlook. There is more in the world than their particular corner of the globe, no matter how big.³¹

Returning to OCOM's mandate, it would be responsible for the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, Arctic, and Antarctic Oceans and serve as a force provider for COCOMs with enclosed seas, but these OCOM components would not be just force providers—they would work under OCOM operationally for the vast maritime geography of the globe. Given the size of the geography covered, the OCOM commander must be a four-star maritime officer (e.g., Navy, Marine Corps, or even Coast Guard) billet and could be based anywhere, although basing the command in Norfolk, Virginia, or even Washington, DC (as Admiral King was during World War II), would be suitable given the command and control structure in place today and the ability to coordinate

at the highest levels. Like King, the OCOM commander could travel as needed to conferences for key strategic decisions. One of the most important key conferences that settled Pacific strategy in World War II took place in Washington, DC, in the spring of 1943.³² OCOM would be coequal, not subordinate, to the other COCOMS and like them work directly for the secretary of defense. Also like them, per the Goldwater-Nichols Act, it would have budget input and authority. OCOM would also be a true Joint staff, with billets assigned for officers from other Services. Having an officer from a different Service (e.g., an Air Force general) occupy the deputy commander position should be standard. This approach would spread the appreciation of the global nature of maritime power. “Seablindness” is not just an affliction of the public and civilians.³³ Other non-DOD government agencies would also have requirements for liaison officers assigned to the OCOM staff, especially from executive departments such as the Department of Transportation that deal with shipping and port infrastructure.

What about INDOPACOM? Under this arrangement, command in the Pacific would not go away per se—perhaps it could be based in Korea or Japan or Guam and become a U.S. Western Pacific Command under the existing parameters of the current INDOPACOM. Obviously, some letterheads will have to change. But COCOMs have come and gone in the past, with the U.S. Joint Force Command being one example and perhaps soon joined by the U.S. Africa Command or U.S. Southern Command, or both.³⁴ One can argue that this creates further decentralization of authority and command responsibility, but such a restructuring actually provides the United States a command with global authority and strategic scope (the others being STRATCOM and SPACECOM). Maritime strategy would finally have a full-time

organization committed to thinking globally should global maritime war once again encompass the planet as it did twice in the twentieth century.

In 2010, retired U.S. Marine Corps general Anthony C. Zinni, who commanded CENTCOM in 1997–2000, visited the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to speak to that year's class. His words challenged the students, particularly his claim that after the end of the Cold War "no reordering was done of the global situation . . . no one had the 'global portfolio'."³⁵ The creation of an OCOM would go a long way toward solving some of that problem, as that specific command would have the global portfolio for the maritime oceanic commons. One of the great fissures in the U.S. strategic makeup is that military global strategy, the purview of the president and the secretary of defense, is often fractured in its development and implementation. Ironically, this disunity comes from attempts at creating unity with the National Security Act of 1947 and other more recent reforms such as the Goldwater-Nichols Act.³⁶ The result is a Unified Command Plan that creates competing regional commanders who often can see no farther than the landward boundaries of their areas of responsibility. Creation of an OCOM would not solve this problem per se, but it would at least return unity to the maritime commons and bring a global strategic perspective to the highest levels inside the DOD. It would also give American seapower the strategic advocate, and with the requisite authority, that it deserves.

¹ Robert C. Rubel, "Command of the Sea Redux," *Naval War College Review* 75, no. 2 (Spring 2022). Capt Rubel is a retired naval aviator who served as the dean of the Center of Naval Warfare Studies at the Naval War College until his retirement.

² All commands in the Unified Command Plan are now considered combatant commands, their type being either geographic or functional. For example, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command is geographic, whereas the U.S. Transportation Command is functional.

³ For these “malaises” see, for example, Megan Eckstein, “How Far Has the U.S. Navy Come since the *McCain, Fitzgerald* Collisions?: Five Questions with Surface Navy Stakeholders,” *Defense News*, 22 August 2022; and Dmitry Filipoff, “Force Structure Perspectives: Congresswoman Elaine Luria on Getting Congress Involved,” Center for Maritime International Security, 30 October 2020.

⁴ Eckstein, “How Far Has the U.S. Navy Come since the *McCain, Fitzgerald* Collisions?”

⁵ “*Abraham Lincoln* Carrier Strike Group Returns to Homeport,” Navy.mil, 11 August 2022.

⁶ See John T. Kuehn, “Aviator Flight Log Book,” Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV) Form 3760-31 (Revision), May 1982–July 2000, 2 vols., author’s collection, for confirmation of this information, including flight combat time and cruise lengths.

⁷ Peter D. Haynes, *Toward a New Maritime Strategy: American Naval Thinking in the Post-Cold War Era* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015), 8–10, 44–47; and Steven T. Wills, *Strategy Shelved: The Collapse of Cold War Naval Strategic Planning* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2021), 7–9, 23–24.

⁸ LCdr Jason Davis, USN, interview with author, 11 January 2011. Davis, a Lockheed EP-3E Aries II naval flight officer, served as a convoy electronic countermeasures officer for U.S. Army truck convoys in Iraq because of the Army’s paucity of trained electronic warfare officers.

⁹ “*USS Abraham Lincoln* (CVN 72): Ship’s History,” Navy.mil, accessed 21 March 2025.

¹⁰ Thomas C. Hone and Curtis A. Utz, *History of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, 1915–2015* (Washington, DC: Naval History and Heritage Command, 2023), 118–25.

¹¹ *Wings over the Water*, directed by David Hoffman (Camden, ME: Varied Directions, 1986); and David Kohnen *King’s Navy: Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King and the Rise of American Sea Power, 1897–1947* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 2024), 313–26.

¹² Kohnen, *King’s Navy*, 59–88.

¹³ See Tom Hone, “American Sea Power Project: Alliances and Coalitions Are Essential,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 148, no. 7 (July 2022): 72.

¹⁴ David Rigby, *Allied Master Strategists: The Combined Chiefs of Staff in World War II* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012), 1, 10. Leahy was appointed to the Combined Chiefs of Staff in July 1942. His authority over the other chiefs was negligible as compared to that of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff today. The 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act gives the current chairman the bulk of their authority.

¹⁵ John T. Kuehn, *America’s First General Staff: A Short History of the Rise and Fall of the General Board of the Navy, 1900–1950* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017), 196–200.

¹⁶ FAdm Ernest J. King, USN, *U.S. Navy at War, 1941–1945: Official Reports to the Secretary of the Navy by Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, U.S. Navy, Commander in Chief, United States Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations* (Washington, DC: Navy Department, 1946), 1–3, 31.

¹⁷ See, for example, Evan Mawdsley, *The War for the Seas: A Maritime History of World War II* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 503n27, 554.

¹⁸ See Richard R. Burgess “Adding to the Fleet: Navy Evolves to Counter Changing Threats,” *Seapower Magazine*, 17 March 2021; and “U.S. Fleet Forces Command,” Navy.mil, accessed 10 October 2024.

¹⁹ For a current Joint doctrinal definition of *unity of command*, see *JTF C2 and Organization*, 2d ed., Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2020), 2.

²⁰ King, *U.S. Navy at War*, appendices A–C; and “USNI News Fleet and Marine Tracker,” *USNI News*, 1 August 2022.

²¹ Trent Hone, *Learning War: The Evolution of Fighting Doctrine in the U.S. Navy, 1898–1945* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 329–30.

²² Carl LaVO, *Pushing the Limits: The Remarkable Life and Times of Vice Adm. Allan Rockwell McCann*, USN (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013), 1–5.

²³ Hone and Utz, *History of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations*, 152–67.

²⁴ John T. Kuehn, *Strategy in Crisis: The Pacific War, 1937–1945* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2023), chapters 4 and 6.

²⁵ *Blue-water missions* can be defined as those not involved with power projection over land or amphibious operations; for example, the submarine campaign against Japan's sea lines of communication or defeating the Japanese fleet in the Mariana Islands in June 1944. Kuehn, *Strategy in Crisis*, 129–32, 135–44.

²⁶ Hone and Utz, *History of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations*, 205–7, 221–37.

²⁷ Haynes and Wills make this case in *Toward a New Maritime Strategy and Strategy Shelved*.

²⁸ See David E. Sanger with Mary K. Brooks, *New Cold Wars: China's Rise, Russia's Invasion, and America's Struggle to Defend the West* (New York: Random House, 2024).

²⁹ Adm Lisa M. Franchetti, USN, *Chief of Naval Operations Navigation Plan for America's Warfighting Navy, 2024* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 2024).

³⁰ For readers wishing a near exhaustive cataloging of the weaknesses of both the uniformed and civilian maritime services as well as shipyard and manning problems, see the following sources: "What's Going on with Shipping," YouTube channel, accessed 10 October 2024; "Cdr Salamander" (blog), accessed 10 October 2024; and "gCaptain" (forum), accessed 10 October 2024.

³¹ Per section 151 of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff serves as the military advisor to the president and the secretary of defense. Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, Pub. L. 99-433, 100 Stat. 992 (1986).

³² Kuehn, *Strategy in Crisis*, 90–92.

³³ Seth Cropsey, *Seablindness: How Political Neglect Is Choking American Seapower and What to Do about It* (New York: Encounter, 2017).

³⁴ See "Proposed Cuts—Merging EUCOM and AFRICOM," Reddit, accessed 21 March 2025.

³⁵ Gen Anthony C. Zinni, USMC (Ret), comments at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 11 August 2009.

³⁶ For a full discussion of the 1947 National Security Act and 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act, see John T. Kuehn, "Abolish the Office of the Secretary of Defense?," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 47 (4th Quarter 2007): 114–16.