

The Seventh Cornerstone of Naval Operations

The home team has the advantage

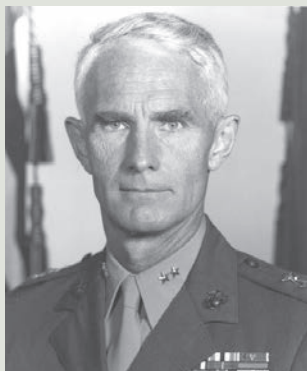
by Dr. Jim Holmes, BGen William J. Bowers & Col Thomas D. Wood

MajGen Richard C. Schulze Memorial Essay

The MajGen Richard C. Schulze Memorial Essay honors the memory of the Marine Corps general officer for whom it is named. MajGen Schulze, a native of Oakland, CA, died in November 1983, two years after his retirement. An enlisted Marine at the time of his commissioning in 1951, he earned his B.A. in Far East history from Stanford University in 1954 and later earned an M.S. in public administration from George Washington University (1971).

He was a mortar section leader with the 1st Marines in Korea and commanded 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, in Vietnam. MajGen Schulze served as director of three different divisions within the Manpower Department at Headquarters. He also served as Inspector General of the Marine Corps and as CG, Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. He was a frequent contributor to the *Gazette* and wrote with philosophical insight on many of the intractable problems confronting the Armed Forces—thus the naming of this annual essay in his honor is singularly appropriate.

The Schulze Memorial Essays have been published each year since 1984. They are made possible by the earnings of an endowment fund established by friends of MajGen Schulze. Essay authors are chosen by the Editorial Advisory Committee of the *Gazette* and typically include a prominent academic in the field of maritime strategic thought of interest to the Marine Corps.



On 12 October 2018, the President of Marine Corps University (MCU) hosted select students and faculty from the Naval Postgraduate School during a World War II case study on the opening of the Solomon Islands Campaign. The gathering was particularly meaningful because among the participants was the eminent naval tactician, author, historian, and professor emeritus, CAPT Wayne P. Hughes, Navy (Ret).¹ At the time, CAPT Hughes had just published a third edition of the highly influential treatise *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations*, which was well on its way to being added to the Marine Corps Commandant's Professional Reading List and was being widely read, cited, and discussed by students in schoolhouses at both Quantico and Monterey. As a result of his indelible impact on naval warfare, MCU asked CAPT Hughes to write the preface to its 2019 anthology *The Legacy of American Naval Power*. The founder of MCU and 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, the legendary Gen Al Gray, had suggested “reinvigorating maritime strategic thought” as the theme for the anthology and for MCU's 2018–2019 academic year.²

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The authors presented this paper in May 2021 at the Naval Post-Graduate School's “Naval Warfare Symposium” in Honor of the late CAPT Wayne Hughes, USN (Ret), 1930–2019.

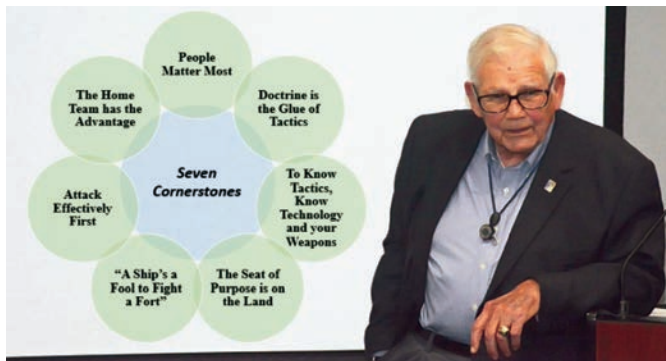


Figure 1. The legendary CAPT Wayne P. Hughes and his seven cornerstones of naval operations. CAPT Hughes published his “six cornerstones” in the first edition of *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations* in 1986, and they have been credited by former Chiefs of Naval Operations as providing “a solid common foundation for understanding throughout the U.S. Navy” and that they “should be committed to memory and beyond; they should become instinct.” *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations*, pp xvii and xxvi. Photo from BGen Bowers’ 2018 presentation “Future of Naval Expeditionary Operations.” (Source: U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Victoria Ochoa.)

Weeks later, and just months before he passed away, CAPT Hughes submitted his draft, underscoring how the six existing cornerstones of naval expeditionary operations he posited were also lenses through which to examine America’s employment of maritime strength across our history. But with an eye to the future, he added a seventh cornerstone: “The Home Team Has the Advantage.”³ His rationale for adding this new cornerstone is worth quoting at length because it appears to have been shaped by the students’ insights gleaned from the Solomon Islands case study:

For the Marine Corps and its expeditionary operations there is a seventh cornerstone related to getting there first. In littoral warfare, *the home team has the advantage*. This is not merely an issue of offense versus defense. It is a recognition that the littorals, where Marines traditionally operate, are dynamic, complex fighting environments where all operational and geographical domains intersect. Each combat circumstance is unique. Therefore, local knowledge of topography, geography, hydrography, and oceanography plays a critical and variable role in the tactical employment of forces.

Where Marines have traditionally operated, the invading force is at a disadvantage and must redouble its efforts to understand the local environment. The seventh cornerstone puts the burden on the Marine Corps to set conditions for success early by knowing the terrain, the people, and culture of the people. Building relationships with allies and partners can give the Marine Corps the home team advantage in the face of aggressive attempts to seize territory. The year-long Solomon Islands campaign during the Second World War was a brilliant example of Navy-Marine air-sea-ground collaboration. On the other hand, it is far better today ... to *prevent* conflict from getting out of control and escalating into a world war. Today a maritime containment strategy is particularly applicable against China and/or Russia, and perhaps Iran.⁴ (Emphasis in original.)

This article proceeds in the spirit of CAPT Hughes’s observations, and its purpose is twofold. First, it provides a thorough analysis of what “home team advantage” means within the context of great-power competition within the Western Pacific, an area where competition is intense and

allied naval expeditionary forces will come under serious challenges within the decade. Second, it draws upon Alfred Thayer Mahan’s admonition that the three pillars of naval power are commerce, fleets, and bases to explore an undervalued and under-analyzed, yet often most tangible and visible expression of our alliance commitments. Namely, our advanced naval bases and how they contribute to a “home team advantage”—particularly as the United States and its home-team Asian allies face an increasingly coercive and aggressive competitor in the Indo-Pacific.

Home Team v. Home Team

Wayne Hughes sensibly maintains that the home team has the advantage in warfare. A multitude of advantages go to the contender that knows the terrain, has bases, manpower, armaments, and resources of all types close at hand, and can strike out to sea with land based aircraft and missiles as well as seagoing forces. An away team—an expeditionary combat force—finds it hard to surmount these advantages, outmatching the home team on its own field.

CAPT Hughes’s insight is doubtless correct, but the rule of home team primacy holds imperfectly amid crowded geo-strategic terrain. Geography may not be destiny, but it has situated not one but *multiple* home teams, including Russia, the opposing Korean states, China, and Japan, in Northeast Asia. Residing in close proximity to one another across the Okhotsk, Yellow, and East China Seas, these powerful nations compete on the same field and know it well. The latter two contestants, which are our focus, have carried on an intermittent and often fierce competitive relationship ever since the seventh century. That is when Prince Shōtoku, the Japanese regent and crown prince, reputedly rebuffed Chinese diplomatic communications intimating that Japan should accept the status of a “tributary.”

Tributaries were lesser states that afforded the Chinese court political deference in return for material benefits such as the right to trade in the Middle Kingdom. In 607 AD, the regent opened a note to the Sui emperor thus: “From the sovereign of the land of the rising sun to the sovereign of the land of the setting sun.”⁵ The language signified sovereign equality rather than relations between a superior and an inferior. Such effrontery evidently did not sit well with the emperor, who made no reply. The exchange set the tone for Sino-Japanese relations, putting China’s rulers on notice that Japan refused to accept a subordinate place in Asia’s Sinocentric hierarchy. Rivalry has typified bilateral relations ever since. Now as in the age of Prince Shōtoku, both teams are intimately acquainted with Asian geography. Both station militarily relevant resources in abundance within easy reach of potential battlegrounds in the Yellow Sea or East China Sea. Hughes’s dictum implies that both teams can harness the intrinsic advantages that go with protecting one’s home turf. However, it says little about who prevails when both teams boast those advantages on the same field. This anomaly beckons our attention to Northeast Asia.

But the strategic configuration today is more intricate than that of antiquity. One of the home teams, Japan, has played

host to a visiting team, the United States, since the end of World War II. Some 54,000 American Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Soldiers, along with more than 53,000 U.S. civil servants, contractors, and family members accompanying the force, are a visible, human reminder of the United States' commitment to the U.S.-Japan alliance. They make up the Seventh Fleet at Yokosuka and Sasebo, the III MEF at Okinawa and Iwakuni, the 5th Air Force at Okinawa, Yokota, and Misawa, and elements of the Army. These armed U.S. contingents fly, sail, and operate alongside Japan's Self-Defense Force and are what the 2018 U.S. *National Defense Strategy* refers to as "contact" and "blunt" layer forces.⁶ Contact forces compete beneath the threshold of armed conflict, while blunt forces deter aggression or deny an opponent its aims should it resort to arms. Barring a rift within the U.S.-Japan alliance, this is the composite home/away team that would take the field against China.

The U.S.-Japan team can also summon reinforcements from the Eastern Pacific, namely the U.S. Pacific Fleet. Affiliated joint forces would come from bases in Guam, Hawaii, and the U.S. West Coast. Yet, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has built a formidable array of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) weaponry precisely to keep U.S. reinforcements from arriving on station in time to intercede decisively against Chinese aggression. In the ideal case from Beijing's standpoint, anti-access measures would keep the U.S. Pacific Fleet out of the Western Pacific altogether; a more realistic goal for the PLA is to keep the Pacific Fleet from reaching the scene of battle in time to make a difference. Either way, PLA commanders hope to present Tokyo and Washington a *fait accompli*, a done deal, and dare them to reverse it at prohibitive cost and danger to themselves. For their part, the allies can try to blunt PLA anti-access strategy, helping reinforcements gain entry to embattled waters, skies, and shores. They can also attempt to encumber Chinese access to the Western Pacific—imprisoning Chinese shipping in home waters.

Balance of Home-Team Advantages

Strategic grandmaster Carl von Clausewitz fashions an instrument to help a martial competitor discover how many resources it must mobilize to wage strategic competition or war. First, he says a contender must examine its "own political aim and that of the enemy." Second, "we must gauge the strength and situation of the opposing state." Third, "we must gauge the character and abilities of its government and people and do the same in regard to our own." And fourth, "we must evaluate the political sympathies of other states and the effect the war may have on them." Space constraints rule out assaying a comprehensive net assessment here. Indeed, Clausewitz himself noted that Sir Isaac Newton would quail at the countless factors that have to be appraised to produce an accurate net assessment. Only through intuition informed by information can a war leader gauge the correlation of national power.⁷

Three elements of a Clausewitzian net assessment, most salient to the dual home team competition between China

and the U.S.-Japan alliance, stand out: political aims, geography, and military power. First, China's political aims are encapsulated in what Chinese Communist Party (CCP) general secretary Xi Jinping labels the "Chinese Dream," a national rejuvenation following a long "century of humiliation" (1839–1949) at the hands of seaborne conquerors—chiefly European and Japanese empires.⁸ As Professor Sally Paine notes, the century of humiliation reached a nadir in 1894–1895, when the Imperial Japanese Navy crushed the Qing Dynasty's Beiyang (or Northern) Fleet off the Korean coast. Japan's stunning victory displaced China from its perch atop the Asian order. The Qing navy was China's last serious navy, but Beijing does not accept the verdict of 1895 as final. Ever since, says Paine, "the focus of Chinese foreign policy has been to undo [the war's] results whereas the focus of Japanese foreign policy has been to confirm them."⁹

Repealing traumatic history and restoring Asia's Sino-centric order is China's dream. Xi's all-consuming project demands that China make itself prosperous, enabling Beijing to accumulate lineaments of military might and diplomatic influence. It will use newfound national power to revise the Asian and world orders to suit China's interests as CCP magnates construe them. For instance, the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which ended the Sino-Japanese War, transferred Taiwan to Japanese administration, where it remained until

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1945 before becoming home to the Republic of China in the late 1940s. Japan also solidified its claim and authority over the Senkaku Islands, another object of lingering dispute, in the Sino-Japanese War's aftermath.¹⁰ Reversing the debacle of 1895—and fulfilling its national dream—demands that China regain this offshore real estate by whatever means necessary. Only thus can it turn back the clock.

Communist China, in other words, must pursue strategically offensive aims vis-à-vis Japan to make its dream come true. It wants back what Japanese arms wrested from the Qing Dynasty. Now, Beijing will not concede that it is playing offense. It will cast its goals as strategically defensive, insisting that it merely wants to recover property that once belonged to imperial China and thus, by implication, belongs to China for all time—regardless of who is in charge in Beijing.

Japan will not readily capitulate to its giant neighbor's demands. Japan and its American ally want to preserve what is, not to take something from China. They are conservators of the regional order as it has existed since the downfall of Imperial Japan in 1945 and the emergence of the U.S.-Japan

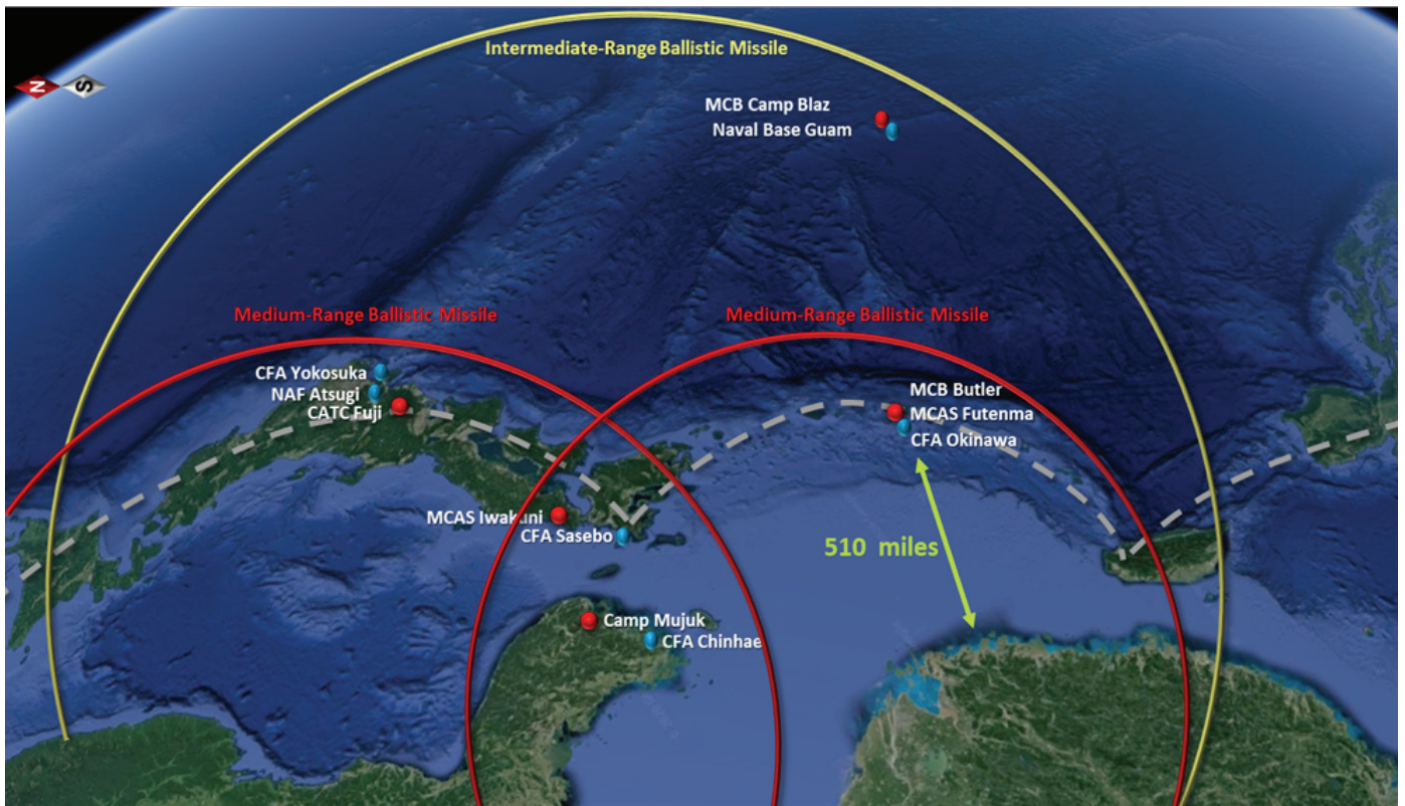


Figure 2. Mahan's "chain" in the contemporary missile era. (Source: Col Robert Castro, USMC(Ret.))

security partnership. Defending a status quo is strategically defensive in nature. The allies can content themselves with a prevent defense whereas China must bid for outright victory to fulfill its political goals. Of course, football aficionados would remind us that a prevent defense yields ground in hopes of preventing a decisive strike—and ground is what China covets. A passive defensive mindset is something to avoid. Sports metaphors have their limits.

Second, geography is a friend to the allies. A hybrid continental/sea power, China occupies a central geographic position in maritime Asia. Like all contestants that share land frontiers with potential rivals, China cannot neglect terrestrial defense, even as it turns its attentions seaward in pursuit of regional eminence. Yet, Beijing's maritime project confronts a stubborn geostrategic problem even apart from competing demands of land defense. Namely, what Chinese strategists call Asia's "first island chain" lies athwart the sea and air lanes connecting the PRC mainland with the broad Pacific. U.S. allies or partners occupy the entire island chain, which, if fortified, could obstruct China's access to the high seas and thus its commercial, military, and diplomatic prospects in Asia and the wider world. Accordingly, Chinese strategists regard the island chain as a "metal chain" that could bar their access to the high seas and ruin China's dream of commercial and political supremacy.¹¹

CAPT Alfred Thayer Mahan, arguably history's most influential maritime historian and theorist, likewise uses the metaphor of the chain. He depicts sea power as a "chain" connecting domestic production with foreign distribution

of goods.¹² The sea—the maritime thoroughfare whereby seafaring commercial societies transport wares and military power—constitutes the central link in Mahanian sea power. A maritime state that sees that central link fractured, curbing its access to the sea and foreign harbors beyond, sees its nautical fortunes falter. The first island chain, which runs north-south, thus crosses and obstructs China's Mahanian sea-power chain, which runs mainly east-west. In other words, Chinese mercantile and military shipping and aircraft must transit through the island chain's littoral "chokepoints," or narrow seas—which it does not control—if China is to prosper as a trading, military, and diplomatic competitor.

A glance at the map conveys this grim reality. When CCP leaders and commanders look offshore, they cannot help but notice that the first island chain completely encloses the mainland's continental crest. No Chinese seaport outflanks it, furnishing a ready outlet to the high seas. Just as worrisome, it is inhabited entirely by American allies and partners, some of which play host to U.S. forces and bear impressive military forces of their own. That well-armed potential foes overshadow China's entryways to the sea stokes consternation in Beijing—and hands these opponents a geostrategic lever.

Third, the balance of military power is hard to gauge, as Clausewitz might have foretold. The balance appears roughly equal by raw quantitative measures such as numbers of ships, warplanes, and other military implements. The U.S. Navy numbers 297 battle-force warships in total, including 11 nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, 114 surface combatants, and

68 nuclear-powered submarines (of which 18 are *Ohio*-class missile submarines meant for nuclear deterrence or conventional shore bombardment, not fighting hostile navies).¹³ The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force operates a fleet that includes 45 surface combatants, 21 conventional attack submarines, and associated mine-warfare, amphibious, patrol, and logistics vessels.¹⁴ Against this democratic armada the PLA Navy arrays an approximately 350-ship fleet centered on 2 aircraft carriers, 143 surface combatants, and 68 nuclear and conventionally powered submarines (6 of which are for nuclear deterrence, not sea combat), along with associated mine-warfare, amphibious, patrol, and logistics vessels.¹⁵

Brute numbers, however, obscure the asymmetries between rival sea forces. This is an age of *joint sea power*. Sea power, that is, is no longer the sole province of navies, to the extent it ever was. It is a truism, including for CAPT Hughes, that “a ship’s a fool to fight a fort.” But today the fort’s “guns”—

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anti-ship and anti-air missiles—are no longer rudimentary cannon with ranges measured in a few miles. They can reach hundreds if not thousands of miles out to sea with precision, supplementing the fleet’s firepower at distant scenes of battle. Battlefield strategy is about making oneself stronger than the foe at the decisive place at the decisive time. It matters little how a unit of combat power is delivered to the scene, whether by a fighting ship or by a shorebased warplane or cruise or ballistic missile. Strategists are remiss if they neglect to factor in landbased sea power when tallying up relative power. Fortress China would contribute to a sea fight—so would Fortress Japan.

It appears the PLA holds marked advantages in its variant of theater-wide A2/AD strategy, while the allies can avail themselves of their own advantages to deny China access to the Western Pacific. It is hard to be more precise than that. As strategist Edward Luttwak notes, an adversary’s military implements are “black boxes” in peacetime.¹⁶ A potential opponent, that is, can count up widgets and analyze them by their outward appearance, but it cannot peek inside. Observers cannot confidently judge a weapon system’s capability and quality without seeing it put to the test of combat—the final arbiter of what does and not work in any armory. Analysis is doubly difficult in our software-driven age. If the PLA Navy has made a leap to technological parity with allied fleets, it may command an edge in fleet-on-fleet actions—especially

when counting the shore based arsenal as part of the force mix. If the PLA’s impressive looking armaments remain a generation or more behind, the advantage may still reside with the allies. After all, numbers are not everything. Remember that the Soviet Navy always outnumbered Western fleets during the late Cold War by massive margins in platforms such as nuclear-powered submarines. Few analysts pronounced it the superior combat force.

If they use geography wisely, the allies can leverage their advantages at manageable cost relative to China. It does not take an über-pricey cruiser or carrier to plug up a strait to maritime or air traffic. It takes missile- and sea-mine-armed surface and subsurface craft operating in and around the straits in concert with troops firing missiles from the islands and aircraft flying overhead. Light combatants can bear the brunt of fighting along the defensive line of scrimmage that is the first island chain—leaving heavy forces to prowl behind the line in case PLA forces break through into the backfield. There is no substitute for monitoring and continually updating appraisals of the situation in the Western Pacific—not just through static analyses such as this but through a regimen of frequent wargames, exercises, and maneuvers.

Becoming the Stronger Home Team

The U.S.-Japan team boasts one fundamental strategic advantage, namely that it is easier to hold something than to take it. The allies hold the prized real estate; China would have to take it. In that sense, the PLA is the visiting team along the island chain, at the eastward edge of the playing field. Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, the military architect of German unification and one of history’s foremost martial practitioners, lays out the logic succinctly: “The tactical defense is the stronger [form of war], the strategic offensive the more effective form—and the only one that leads to the goal.”¹⁷ In other words, the contender that seizes or occupies some site or object, then defends it tactically, positions itself for strategic success.

Mahan’s contemporary, maritime historian Julian S. Corbett, imports Moltkean insights into the near-shore arena. He declares that combining strategic offense with tactical defense offers good prospects for success in a limited war—a war in which the combatants have no intention of fighting to the finish and imposing terms on the vanquished. In all probability, any Pacific war will be a limited war, as no one relishes a fight to the finish in the atomic age.¹⁸ Waging tactical defense in concert with strategic offense, says Corbett,

presupposes that we are able by superior readiness or mobility or by being more conveniently situated to establish ourselves in the territorial object before our opponent can gather strength to prevent us. This done, we have the initiative, and the enemy being unable ... to attack us at home, must conform to our opening by endeavoring to turn us out. We are in a position to meet his attack on ground of our own choice and to avail ourselves of such opportunities of counter-attack as his distant and therefore exhausting offensive movements are likely to offer.¹⁹

It seems, then, that possession is nine-tenths of the law in battlefield strategy just as in everyday life. Terrain, geographic

distance, and the initiative work on the defender's behalf, making counterattack a daunting prospect for the challenger. Moltkean logic is doubly compelling in the marine realm. Corbett proclaims that if "the territorial object is sea-girt and our enemy is not able to command the sea," that augurs well for the defender's chances of holding the disputed ground.²⁰ Islands are nothing if not sea-girt. Maritime command converts the sea into a barrier, helping confound the attacker's attempts at tactical offense. *This is an intensely joint, amphibian vision of littoral operations in a contested environment.*

How can the U.S.-Japan team augment its strategic advantages, priming itself for success in strategic competition or war? With apologies to CAPT Hughes, there is far more to the challenge than fleet tactics, indispensable though his brand of tactical artistry remains. This is a grand strategic challenge. Let us work from the political and grand-strategic levels down toward force design, operations, and tactics. First of all, the alliance—like any international consortium—could prove fissile under the stress and strain of competition. As master statesman Klemens von Metternich once noted, "with alliances as with all fraternizations ... if they do not have a strictly determinate aim, they disintegrate."²¹ Beijing also gets a say in relations between Washington and Tokyo. China is a consummate breaker of alliances and will grasp at any opportunity to divide America and Japan. Despite their longstanding security fellowship, it behooves the teammates to ensure that the U.S.-Japan alliance has a strictly determinate aim—spelling out precisely what the allies will and will not do should China call this or that play on the field of competition.

Second, the allies must answer an unobtrusive but crucial strategic question: should they exempt PLA forces not at sea or aloft from attack? The temptation to allow the PLA a sanctuary on the mainland will be powerful. China is a nuclear-armed antagonist. Even conventional strikes on its homeland raise the possibility of atomic retaliation. Striking the mainland, furthermore, could cement popular support for Xi Jinping's policies—making China an even tougher and more spirited foe. On the other hand, ruling the mainland off-limits would permit the PLA to lash out at allied forces with impunity from shore airfields and missile batteries. In effect, Tokyo and Washington would instruct expeditionary forces to try to evade or absorb a beating without hitting back at the force administering the beating. And what about the politics of sanctuary? Whether the Japanese and American people would allow their leaders *not* to hit back when their sons and daughters were under siege—and being wounded or killed—is likewise worth mulling.

Teamwork depends on the allies agreeing on a common approach. If they do declare Fortress China a safe haven, Moltke's logic may apply weakly along the first island chain—if at all. The PLA could simply pound away at allied forces at its leisure until they stood little chance of withstanding a breakout attempt from the PLA Navy or Air Force. The allies' geostrategic advantage could be forfeit. How much forbearance to exercise is a question of utmost import for team captains.

Third, the allies must render combined forces as resilient and heavy-hitting as possible—more so if they do designate the mainland as a PLA haven. They should make every effort to "harden" fixed facilities such as bases against air and missile attack. Hardening could mean bolstering passive defenses through such measures as moving key infrastructure underground, dispersing it, and improving repair capability to restore it to action after an assault. It could mean augmenting active air and missile defenses. It could also mean identifying and equipping temporary anchorages or airfields to which ships and planes could scatter if an attack appeared imminent. Dispersed and diverse infrastructure challenges PLA targeting and reduces destructive outcomes when struck. In aggregate, hardened and dispersed infrastructure enables allied forces to "stand in" and persevere in the face of adversary attack. Creating a network of strong, resilient littoral bulwarks in the first island chain underwrites deterrence on the home field, which Japan and China share.²²

Fourth, the allies would be wise to leverage the relative maturity of the Korean theater. The U.S.-Republic of Korea alliance benefits from 70 years of sustained investments in prepositioned equipment and ordnance, mature airfields and ports, and an array of highly capable bases manned by formidable forces. While some might express reasonable skepticism about the political viability of involving an additional home team in any conflict involving China, the realities of munition and fuel consumption alone demand that allied leaders examine Korea's role in Western Pacific contingencies. Expanding the scope of exercises on the Korean Peninsula to account for regional conflict is as critical as it is prudent. Laying the diplomatic groundwork for tripartite cooperation is crucial in light of fraught relations across the Tsushima Strait. Allied officials should begin now if they hope Seoul will join with Tokyo and Washington to frustrate aggression.

The same principles of hardening and improved resiliency that apply to ground facilities apply to fleet design. While it seems doubtful that future surface combatant ships' hulls will feature heavy armor, their most basic passive defense against attack, naval leaders have committed themselves to such passive defenses as improved electronic warfare to fool or blind incoming enemy weapons. They are also pushing active defenses such as long-range anti-ship and anti-air missiles, including hypersonics, along with directed-energy weapons able to dazzle or—once engineers boost their power output markedly—shoot down hostile ordnance. Acknowledging that no technological advance will render individual combatants impervious to attack; however, naval leaders have resolved to procure more, smaller, and cheaper platforms that can fan out on the map or nautical chart. Each unit will comprise a smaller percentage of the fleet's aggregate fighting power. A fleet made up of many fighting ships could afford to lose one or a few in action yet battle on, whereas losing a carrier, cruiser, or major amphibious transport today would deduct a major share of the fleet's strength—debilitating the ability of the fleet as a whole to prevail in a trial of arms. And prevailing despite losses is what strategy and operational art



Figures 3–6. Giants of strategic thought about sea control, the littorals, maritime logistics, and the irreplaceable value of advanced naval bases. From left to right: MajGen Commandant John Lejeune, ADM Arthur Hepburn, RADM Bradley Fiske, and CAPT Arthur Mahan. (Sources: Marine Corps University and the U.S. Navy’s Naval History and Heritage Command.)

are all about, which gets to the heart of what is most essential in the Western Pacific: *effective deterrence*.

Bases, Posture, and 21st-Century Deterrence

In 1911, on the eve of World War I and informed by his voluminous research on British sea power, Mahan opined that “[f]ortified bases of operations are as needful to a fleet as to an army.”²³ Nine years later, and just months after the Great War’s armistice, MajGen Commandant John A. Lejeune declared before the House Naval Affairs Committee that “[f]leets cannot survive without bases.”²⁴ RADM Bradley Fiske likened naval stations’ purpose to “supplying and replenishing the stored-up energy required for naval operations,” much as travelers plug into USB ports periodically to charge the batteries in their portable devices.²⁵ Although more than a century has passed since Mahan, Lejeune, and Fiske left their fingerprints on thinking about the relationship between bases and sea power, their admonitions have direct relevance to home-team advantage in today’s hypercompetitive Western Pacific.

The evolution of thinking about advanced naval bases during the twentieth century provides an instructive prologue for understanding today’s linkages between home-team advantage, efforts to assure allies of American steadfastness and prowess, and deterrence. In the summer of 1938, as the international-security situation was deteriorating, the Secretary of the Navy directed ADM Arthur J. Hepburn, the commandant of the 12th Naval District in San Francisco, to: survey the Navy’s shore-based infrastructure, identify existing bases in need of additional investments, and make recommendations for the construction of new naval bases. Hepburn intuitively understood sea control and sea denial, as well as the critical role shore based capabilities could play in sustaining forward naval power.

A veteran of combat at sea during the Spanish-American War, Hepburn had served in five battleships and, during World War I, commanded a submarine-chaser base in Ireland. In late 1938, he submitted an exhaustive report to Congress recommending massive investments and base expansions in

the Pacific. According to the U.S. Army’s Center for Military History, the report declared that Guam

should be developed into a fully equipped fleet base with air and submarine facilities ... The advantages of establishing a strong base at Guam were enormous ... [and] such a base would create “the most favorable conditions ... for the prosecution of naval operations in the Western Pacific,” and would contribute greatly to the defense of Hawaii and the continental United States. By limiting hostile naval operations to the south, a fortified base at Guam would also serve to protect the trade routes to the Netherlands [East] Indies and greatly simplify naval problems “should the fleet ever be called upon for operations in the Far East.” And even if the United States withdrew from the western Pacific, the base at Guam ... would have great value as a deterrent to any nation “contemplating a hostile move from the general area towards the Hawaiian Islands.”²⁶

Today’s advanced naval bases—descendants of the coaling stations of Mahan’s era—continue to serve a vital purpose in assuring allies that the United States will keep its security commitments, competing below the threshold of traditional armed conflict, deterring potential adversaries, and, should deterrence fail, reducing response times in the face of crisis. As was the case in 1938, investments in Pacific installations remain difficult to realize. In stark contrast to the 1930s, however, today’s guided-missile era raises the stakes and makes investments in advanced naval bases more essential to harnessing the home-team advantage and achieving a balanced approach to deterrence—an approach weighted less towards “deterrence by punishment” and more towards “deterrence by denial.” Deterrence by punishment aspires to convince an opponent not to do something it prefers to do by showing that its actions will trigger unbearable consequences after the fact. Deterrence by denial aspires to convince an opponent it stands little or no chance of accomplishing its goals. Punishment is reactive, denial proactive.

Advanced naval bases strengthen deterrence in three major ways. First, advanced naval bases are a tangible manifestation of the political solidarity of the U.S.-Japan alliance. President Joseph Biden’s recently published interim national-security guidance highlights the premium the U.S. administration places on both direct and extended deterrence, stating: “At



A tangible manifestation of our nation's commitment to allies and their commitment to us. Nearly half of the workforce required to operate installations in Japan are local professionals and skilled craftsmen. (Source: LCpl Karis Mattingly, Marine Corps Installations Pacific.)

its root, ensuring our national security requires us to ... promote a favorable distribution of power to deter and prevent adversaries from directly threatening the United States and our allies.”²⁷ The multitude of bases scattered throughout the Japanese archipelago are the locations where more than 100,000 U.S. service members, civilians, and family members project democratic values and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with thousands of Japanese citizens, many of which have been in service on U.S. military installations for decades. Advanced bases underscore another CAPT Hughes’ truism: “people matter most.”

Second, the allies’ network of mutually supporting bases within the first island chain amounts to a diversified array of platforms from which the alliance can perform sea-control and sea-denial missions while reducing undue dependence on any one node. Recent progress aboard co-use bases by U.S. and Japan Self-Defense forces is advancing complementary capabilities and expanding the options naval expeditionary

Strengthening home-team advantages will be more of a challenge ... than ever before, but one that the current and future teams of U.S. and Japanese naval expeditionary forces must embrace ...

forces can employ in a contingency. Adding cooperative security locations—in essence “warm” bases with prepositioned logistics, supporting infrastructure, and minimal staffing—is an innovative and proven model ripe for adoption in Japan. This is especially true in areas where establishing permanent bases would be a doubtful prospect on political grounds. The

imperative to improve *base interoperability* is another factor spurring efforts to develop a deeper understanding of how to bolster the resiliency of these bases. Overseas base defense for U.S. forces is actually homeland defense for Japan, and they take it very seriously, highlighting another of CAPT Hughes’ truisms: “the seat of purpose is on land.”

Third, the aggregate of alliance solidarity and expanded capabilities generated by complementary bases can bolster deterrence by denial. There is an emerging consensus that the “stable balance of terror” deterrent logic so prevalent during the Cold War is ill-suited to the challenges of the 21st century, particularly in the Pacific.

Bases can help deflate such misperceptions among Chinese leaders, showing that Washington cares just as much about its regional commitments as does Beijing. As Mahan and Corbett foresaw, overseas bases combine the attributes of resiliency, utility, and depth with the virtues of forward presence. Within the first island chain, these littoral bulwarks underwrite the U.S.-Japan maritime alliance. Beyond their military utility, these bases are the most concrete expression of a decades-long commitment to mutual defense. A politically unbreakable home team settles important strategic questions before the outbreak of conflict, improving its odds of deterring a conflict—and succeeding should deterrence fail. Balancing future investments in interoperable and ready forces, lethal capabilities, and a credible deterrent posture is essential to building a winning home team in the Pacific.

Conclusion

In the end, then, CAPT Hughes’ seventh cornerstone, *the home team has the advantage*, is a grand-strategic concept that encompasses far more than fleet tactics. The late, great Marine-warrior-statesman-scholar, George Schultz, who accumulated vast experience in the Pacific over his long and distinguished career, once wrote:

We must recognize the complex and vexing character of this world. We should not indulge ourselves in fantasies of perfection or unfulfillable plans or solutions gained by pressure. It is the responsibility of leaders not to feed the growing appetite for easy promises and grand assurances. The plain truth is this: We face the prospect of all too few decisive or dramatic breakthroughs; we face the necessity of dedicating our energies and creativity to a protracted struggle toward eventual success.²⁸

That is the situation the U.S.-Japan alliance and other democracies face in the Pacific: a protracted strategic struggle and, with the right leadership, eventual success. Strengthening home-team advantages will be more of a challenge and a more team-oriented activity than ever before, but one that the current and future teams of U.S. and Japanese naval expeditionary forces must embrace if they hope to deter conflict and if necessary, fight to win.

Notes

1. The notes from this case study will be made available as an appendix to this volume.

2. The anthology is available at www.usmcu.edu.
 3. The six cornerstones of naval operations are described in detail on pages 9–34 by CAPT Wayne P. Hughes, Jr., USN (Ret) and RADM Robert P. Girrier, USN (Ret), *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations, 3rd Edition*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018). The six cornerstones of naval operations are: (1) Sailors (People) Matter Most, (2) Doctrine is the Glue of Tactics, (3) To Know Tactics, Know Technology, (4) The Seat of Purpose Is on the Land, (5) “A Ship’s a Fool to Fight a Fort,” and (6) Attack Effectively First. Hughes advises that “successful commanders must engrave [the cornerstones] on their souls.”
 4. Wayne P. Hughes Jr, “Preface,” in *The Legacy of American Naval Power: Reinvigorating Maritime Strategic Thought*, (Quantico, VA: MCU Press, 2019).
 5. H. Paul Varley, *Japanese Culture: A Short History*, (New York, NY: Praeger, 1973).
 6. James Mattis, *Unclassified Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, (Washington, DC: 2018).
 7. All of the quotations in this paragraph come from Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).
 8. Staff, “What Does Xi Jinping’s China Dream Mean?” *BBC*, (June 2013), available at www.bbc.com.
 9. S.C.M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
 10. Writes Japan specialist Sheila Smith, the dispute between Japan and China escalated “first in 2010 and far more ominously in 2012,” changing “Japan’s outlook on the possibility of China’s use of force. The Senkaku Islands dispute also fundamentally altered Japan’s thinking about the dynamics of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Preventing the escalation of a crisis involving Japanese and Chinese citizens into a conflict between their two governments became a more pressing priority.” Sheila A. Smith, *Japan Rearmed*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).
 11. Liu Huaqing, *Selected Military Writings of Liu Huaqing*, (Beijing: People’s Liberation Army Press, 2008).
 12. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*, (New York, NY: Dover, 1987).
 13. Staff, “Fleet,” *Naval Vessel Register*, (n.d.), available at <https://www.nvr.navy.mil>.
 14. Staff, “JMSDF Ships,” *GlobalSecurity*, (n.d.), available at <https://www.globalsecurity.org>.
 15. Staff, “Chinese Warships,” *GlobalSecurity*, (n.d.), available at <https://www.globalsecurity.org>.
 16. Edward Luttwak, *The Political Uses of Sea Power*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1974).
 17. Moltke is extrapolating from, and making actionable, Clausewitz’s theories about the relationship between strategic and tactical offense and defense. Helmuth von Moltke, *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings*, ed. Daniel J. Hughes, trans. Daniel J. Hughes and Harry Bell, (New York, NY: Presidio, 1998); and *On War*.
 18. The nuclear context in which naval expeditionary forces operate in the Western Pacific requires more thought and analysis than it’s currently receiving. Escalation control will be an essential component for any operational concept, and this dynamic should be included in military war games and exercises. For more on the second nuclear age in East Asia, see Paul Bracken, *The Second Nuclear Age: Strategy, Danger, and the New Power Politics*, (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 2012).
 19. Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1988).
 20. Ibid.
 21. Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812–1822*, (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap).
 22. Two of the authors defined tactical, operational, strategic, and political hardening in a recent article. Our definitions follow: “Tactical hardening is those material and/or manpower-intensive solutions designed to protect personnel and infrastructure from the effects of kinetic and non-kinetic weapons ... Operational hardening is achieved through force dispersal and distribution, challenging an adversary’s ability to strike lucrative targets by removing them from a fixed geographic area while still enabling friendly commanders to achieve the desired end-state ... Strategic hardening further complicates adversary targeting decisions through formal treaty alliances, co-use activities, and sociocultural significance ... Political hardening is achieved through formal alliances or agreements.” BGen William J. Bowlers and Col Tom Wood, “The Shield of the Indo-Pacific,” *Proceedings*, (November 2020), available at <https://www.usni.org>.
 23. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Naval Strategy, Compared and Contrasted with the Principles of Military Operations on Land*, (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1911).
 24. Office of the Joint Chiefs, *Joint Publication 4-05, Joint Doctrine for Mobilization Planning*, (Washington, DC: Joint Staff, Department of Defense, 1995).
 25. Bradley A. Fiske, *The Navy as a Fighting Machine*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1988).
 26. U.S. Army Center for Military History, *War in the Pacific—Strategy and Command: The First Two Years*, available at <https://history.army.mil>.
 27. Joseph R. Biden, *Interim National Security Guidance*, 2021, White House Website, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov>.
 28. George P. Schultz, *Issues on my Mind: Strategies for the Future*, (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2013).
- >Authors’ Note: The views presented here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense, the Department of the Navy, or the Marine Corps.

