**EISS Paper Proposal**

 **Changing Threat Perceptions and American Grand Strategy**

**Evidence from Maritime Military Exercises**

**Peter Dombrowski and Simon Reich**

Military exercises are largely overlooked by scholars of international security, despite the fact that their planning, executing and subsequent analysis represents a huge investment of any military’s time. There are, of course, a few exceptions (eg. Caravelli, 1983; Heuser, Heier and Lasconjarias, 2018; Kuo and Blankenship, 2022; Malley and Wirtz, 2022) and a handful of enterprising scholars have even generated databases concerning some forms of exercises (eg. Bernhardt, 2022) Yet the study of military exercises remains inexplicably thin given their significance as a metric of national strategy and the wealth of analytic data that they offer on the hundreds of exercises that take place annually by militaries across the globe.

We begin to redress this oversight within the conceptual and empirical space limitations imposed by a paper. First, we explore the empirical, conceptual, and theoretical utility of examining military exercises. We then specifically focus in this case on American sponsored multilateral maritime exercises. We use this as an illustration because this is the only military that conducts such exercises in all three exercise domains – of humanitarian operations, crisis management and preparations for warfighting - on a truly global scale. Second, to demonstrate the conceptual and theoretical utility of exercises, we examine what the shifting patterns of American maritime exercises reveal about the evolving strategic orientations of successive American presidencies (from the Obama to Biden administrations). We argue that these patterns reveal how both American perceptions of threats have altered and with them changing regional prioritizations. Third, we illustratively evaluate this basic proposition on a regional basis over time by examining data from three key regions—Europe, the Greater Middle East and the Indo-Pacific. In conclusion we consider the potential for using military exercises as a useful indicator for studying other important aspects of international security including, for example, the grand strategies of both the United States and its partners.