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Multilateral Maritime Exercises and Strategic Change The American Case and Beyond

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Multilateral military exercises (MMEs) are largely ignored by scholars of international security, despite the fact that they tell us much about a state's strategic goals and contingency plans. They arguably serve as a better indicator of a state's intent than either studying discourse or policy documents alone or other metrics than are often invoked such as force structure, which may take decades to substantially alter. In that sense, they are a better predictor of where states intend to conduct humanitarian operations, manage crises or fight wars. Furthermore, their planning and execution represents a huge investment of any military's time and energy, often being described as the "meat and potatoes" of what military forces do. In sum, they matter in theoretical, policy and operational terms.

We examine that the role that maritime multilateral exercises play in the implementation of American grand strategy in three regions—Europe, the greater Middle East and the Indo-Pacific. First, we develop a conceptual framework, offering a threefold categorization of types and MMEs, and an explanation for why each might predominate in a particular region. Second, we explain why we focus on US-led exercises. We then discuss what MMEs can reveal about the evolving strategies of the last three American presidential administrations (Obama Trump, and Biden). Third, we examine our claims in the U.S.' primary three theaters of operation, examining variance both across the regions and within each region over time and perceptions of the operating environment has changed. Finally, we conclude by considering the potential for using this approach to study the grand strategies of other states) in a comparable manner.

What discipline or branch of humanities or social sciences do you identify yourself with?

Political Science

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Yes, I have included all required information (see below).

Are you a PhD student or early-career researcher?

No

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