



# Executive Summary

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## U.S. LANDPOWER IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

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U.S. landpower in the South China Sea is an essential component to stabilizing this contested region. Together, the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, and Special Operations Forces (SOF) offer distinctive capabilities whose defensive nature in this semi-enclosed maritime environment tend to be less prone to escalation while still sending an unequivocal message of committed support and steady resolve to partners and competitors alike. To establish U.S. landpower as a critical part of security and stability in the region, this monograph presents how its wide-ranging capabilities are important in directly supporting U.S. interests. Even in a sea- and air-dominated environment, landpower's broad operational and diverse support capabilities in pursuit of increasingly interdependent joint and unified operations make it an indispensable element in attaining U.S. interests. Landpower may be the most decisive, flexible, and versatile force through full spectrum operations, fully covering the range from humanitarian assistance to conventional state-on-state warfare; landpower is also crucial to understanding, engaging, and influencing people and leaders. U.S. landpower holds special influence because land forces dominate this region's military structure.

The first of the strategic roles of landpower, to compel or fight and win decisively, is more important than is normally credited in a maritime environment. The U.S. Army provides indispensable support to other forces and agencies through its theater opening and sustaining abilities. Through its core competency of wide area security, U.S. landpower is responsible for passive and active means to protect against external and internal threats. The Army's air and missile defense systems are particularly needed in this anti-access area-denial (A2AD) environment against preemptive strikes. The security role of sea control from the land through anti-ship missiles is a historic and influential one in a semi-enclosed sea environment, but still needs to be operationally developed by U.S. land forces. The counterland mission through surface-

to-surface missiles acts as a shield to suppress close-in attack systems located around the region. Another core competency is combined arms maneuver. Amphibious operations are a useful option during disasters and in the periphery of combat operations around the South China Sea. Maneuver by air offers another option, but is also vulnerable in the current threat environment. Landpower's combat capability is a measure of last resort, but does give credibility to landpower's deter and engage strategic roles.

The second of the strategic roles of U.S. landpower, to deter and prevent war, is also crucial to stability in Southeast Asia. Deterrence needs to exhibit the will to back combat capabilities, which is demonstrated through the forward presence of troops and prepositioning of equipment and supplies. The advantages of forward positioning can be gained through using hardened, dispersed, or temporary facilities. U.S. landpower's ability to help mitigate crises and contingencies, whether security related or from natural or manmade disasters, is another means to show its resolve and capability in the region. The importance of landpower to deterrence and preventing war is due to the resolve that land forces represent when committed by the U.S. Government. With forward presence and the operational interaction with the forces of Southeast Asia, U.S. forces have more opportunity to assure partners.

U.S. landpower's strategic role to engage states and shape conditions may well reduce the need for deterrence or combat. Through security cooperation and engagement activities, regional states may better understand each other and ensure stability and security to address U.S. and regional states' interests. U.S. landpower builds partner capacity through interpersonal and organizational engagements. Security cooperation activities also help to develop the capabilities of friendly forces and regional interoperability through security assistance from the United States. The forward presence of U.S. land forces reinforces

the strengths and advantages of shaping and engagement activities. Although all three U.S. landpower strategic roles—combat and compel, deter and prevent, and engage and shape—are mutually dependent upon each other, engage and shape may be the most important in stabilizing the disputes in the South China Sea.

The use of landpower to address the disputes in the South China Sea is not usually considered in what is typically labeled a maritime- and air-centric theater, but the role of U.S. landpower is profound in this arena, and its influence will be undeniable in preventing war; or, should that fail, winning the peace.

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