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Module 4: Joint Capabilities

29 September 2025

DBF 4.1: Military Operations and the Competition Continuum

Response

QUESTION: *What kind of military operations support cooperation and competition in the competition continuum? How can naval forces contribute to operations across the competition continuum? (minimum of 250 words)*

Primary Post (by September 29, 2025)

Naval forces support cooperation and competition by campaigning to a clear operational objective (OPO). The aim is preservation of a favorable maritime order and prevention of quick unilateral moves below armed conflict. Joint doctrine defines “the competition continuum” as “a world of enduring competition conducted through a mixture of cooperation, adversarial competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict” (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS], 2022, p. xxv). Campaigning links tactical actions to that purpose as “a series of related operations aimed at achieving strategic and operational objectives within a given time and space” (JCS, 2022, p. I-

2). Means rest on forward presence, measured rules of engagement (ROE), and valid authorities. Risk sits in miscalculation and loss of legitimacy.

In cooperation, maritime security patrols, combined exercises, capacity building, information sharing, port visits, and humanitarian assistance expand partner access and decision space. These activities require “the judicious use of force,” and restraint “requires the careful and disciplined balancing of the need for security, the military necessities of the operation, and the pursuit of the objectives,” while legitimacy “may depend on adherence to objectives agreed to by the international community ... and to perceptions of fairness” (JCS, 2022, pp. A-4-A-5).

In competition, naval diplomacy signals resolve while preserving political off-ramps. Warships possess “unique and impressive staying power,” and serve as “a visible and powerful symbol of the country’s intentions and commitments” (Vego, 2016, p. 2). Shows of force, freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs), sanctions enforcement, and maritime interception raise costs for rule-bending while controlling escalation. Sequence presence, surveillance, and limited interdiction, then adjust as intelligence and law allow. The enemy gets a vote, so risk centers on miscalculation; legitimacy and authorities mitigate that risk.

References

Joint Chiefs of Staff. (2022). Joint publication 3-0: Joint campaigns and operations.

Vego, M. (2016). Naval support to foreign policy. Naval War College.

Secondary Post #1 (by October 1, 2025)

QUESTION (Drew): *TODO (minimum of 150 words)*

Drew, good points. I agree and will expand briefly.

For cooperation, use security cooperation, combined exercises, maritime security assistance, HA/DR, and port visits to build access, trust, and interoperability. Keep deterrence in view because “general deterrence is broad and continuous throughout the competition continuum” (JP 3-0, 2022, p. VI-35). For competition below armed conflict, lean on forward presence, ISR, FONOPs, sanctions enforcement support, maritime interdiction support, and information activities to signal resolve, expose malign behavior, and shape choices without crossing into war.

Naval forces contribute across both because of attributes that matter to policymakers and partners. Vego listed them in plain language: “staying power, symbolism, mobility, flexibility, adaptability, versatility, responsiveness, controllability, and self-sufficiency” (Vego, 2016, p. 1). Presence operations and multilateral exercises reassure friends and make coalitions real. FONOPs and maritime interdiction support uphold rules at sea. If the situation cools, “Withdrawal of one’s naval forces is generally much easier” than disengaging ground forces, which preserves political options and limits escalation risk (Vego, 2016, p. 1).

References

- U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. (2022, June 18). Joint campaigns and operations (Joint Publication JP 3-0).
- Vego, M. (2016, May). Naval support of foreign policy (NWC 1132). U.S. Naval War College.

Secondary Post # 2 (*by October 1, 2025*)

QUESTION (Jordan): TODO (minimum of 150 words)

Jordan, sharp post. Let me add one tweak and one caveat.

Cooperation works best when naval presence is paired with practical public goods. Use port visits and exercises to install or upgrade maritime domain awareness nodes, share unclassified surface pictures, and rehearse HA/DR logistics with host-nation command posts. That turns visits into durable access and reduces partner decision time, which is how cooperation pays off in the next crisis (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022). In competition below armed conflict, keep a mix of presence patrols, tailored ISR, FONOPs, and maritime interdiction support, but tie every act to a stated purpose, a legal basis, and a measured effect. Use three simple measures commanders respect: access gained, partner capacity raised, and reaction time cut. Fires sit ready, but information, C2, sustainment, and intelligence do most of the day-to-day work that makes deterrence credible without inviting escalation by mistake (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022).

One caution. Build authorities early. Bring the JAG into planning, align ROE and messaging, and publish what is law enforcement support and what is warfighting. Vego reminded us why navies are the preferred tool here, with accessibility, staying power, controllability, and symbolism that convert presence and duration into influence while preserving political freedom to leave or surge as needed (Vego, 2016). OPART ties it together, translating those attributes across time, space, and force so posture, sea basing, and afloat C2 create operational effects under friction rather than noise without gain (Hone, 2014).

References

Hone, T. (2014). Understanding and using the work of Milan Vego. U.S. Naval War College, Joint Military Operations Department.

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. (2022, June 18). Joint campaigns and operations (Joint Publication JP 3-0).

Vego, M. (2016, May). Naval support of foreign policy (NWC 1132). U.S. Naval War College.

Professor Feedback

Jeff,

Meets Expectations. You display a solid grasp of the Competition Continuum concepts. Excellent responses with concise lists of tasks. Also, BZ on tying this DBF back to elements of OPART.

Good work!