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Module 4: Joint Capabilities

6 October 2025

DBF 4.2: Naval Theory

Response

QUESTION: *How does a navy obtain, maintain, and exploit sea control and/or sea denial? How can other military services influence the ability to obtain, maintain, and exploit sea control and/or sea denial? (minimum of 250 words)*

Primary Post (by October 6, 2025)

Sea control is gained by offensive action against the enemy fleet and the systems that enable sensing, decisions, fires, and refueling. It is maintained through distribution, decision advantage, and resilient sustainment, then exploited to achieve the operational objective (OPO). Control comes in degrees, with sufficient control in time and place to accomplish the mission (Till, 2018). Naval forces obtain sea denial by imposing risk with submarines, mines, and coastal missiles and aircraft, maintain it with dispersed sensors, deception, and mobile shore fires, and exploit it to buy time, protect sea lines of communication (SLOCs), and raise enemy costs (Till, 2018; Vego, 2011).

To obtain control, the fleet commander seizes initiative and seeks favorable battle while attacking reconnaissance, command and control (C2), and logistics to unmask and fix the fleet

that matters. Naval forces use deception, emissions control (EMCON), and counter-C2 to shorten the adversary kill chain while protecting, consistent with the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Navigation Plan on decision advantage and survivability (Gilday, 2022). The joint force commander sets a control or denial OPO, then drives tempo to enemy culmination (Vego, 2011).

To maintain control, the fleet disperses, integrates sensors, and masses effects to blunt salvos, protect inventories, and keep fuel and spares moving. The joint logistics enterprise plans for contested sustainment, including at-sea reload, forward repair, and protected routing, because endurance hinges on munitions flow more than platform count (Gilday, 2022; U.S. Navy et al., 2020).

To exploit control, the joint force selects the course that advances policy with the least cost. Naval and amphibious forces secure lodgments, interdict SLOCs, or impose a blockade, including a distant blockade (Till, 2018; Vego, 2011). Across components, land-based air, ground forces on maritime key terrain, and space and cyber extend sensing, fires, protection, and C2 at the theater scale (U.S. Navy et al., 2020).

References

- Gilday, M. M. (2022). Chief of Naval Operations navigation plan 2022. Department of the Navy.
- Till, G. (2018). *Seapower: A guide for the twenty-first century* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, & U.S. Coast Guard. (2020). *Advantage at sea: Prevailing with integrated all-domain naval power*.
- Vego, M. (2011). *Introduction to naval warfare*. U.S. Naval War College.

Secondary Post #1 (*by October 8, 2025*)

QUESTION (Suzy): (minimum of 150 words)

Hi Suzy, I liked your take on denial buying time. I would add that denial pays off only if it sets conditions to exploit toward the operational objective (OPO) ashore. Otherwise, we trade time for risk. Sea control is temporary, and the sea reverts to an un-commanded state, so gain the slice of sea and time you need, then convert it. Target what lets the enemy see, decide, shoot, and refuel. Use deception, emissions control, and counter-C2 to tighten our kill chain while stretching theirs, which the Navigation Plan tied to decision advantage under fire (Gilday, 2022). For the handoff, weight submarines, mines, and coastal missiles to impose constant risk, but pair them with mobile sensing and joint logistics that keep munitions flowing, conducting offense and defense together, since endurance beats platform counts (Vego, 2011). The payoff comes when denial enables exploitation ashore, whether lodgment, sea lines of communication (SLOC) interdiction, or distant blockade tied to termination conditions and a clear OPO (Till, 2018). I'd take risk in quieter areas and avoid grinding sea skirmishes in order to mass for lodgment and SLOC interdiction on timelines that force enemy culmination.

References

- Gilday, M. M. (2022). Chief of Naval Operations navigation plan 2022. Department of the Navy.
- Till, G. (2018). Seapower: A guide for the twenty-first century (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Vego, M. (2011). Introduction to naval warfare. U.S. Naval War College.

Secondary Post # 2 (*by October 8, 2025*)

QUESTION (Warren): (*minimum of 150 words*)

Hi Warren, sharp Mahanian through-line on commerce and fleet. I would add two checks. Trade is a means, not the objective. The operational objective (OPO) sits in theater, so sea control or denial matters only as it enables that end (Till, 2018). Add the modern focus on choke-point and basing control/denial as instruments toward that end, not ends by themselves. Blockade and choke-point/basing control, plus battle, work only when they collapse the enemy's will or logistics on a campaign timeline.

On joint power projection, agree the ocean is no longer permissive. The task is to distribute, sense, and mass effects fast enough to survive and still deliver fires and fuel where they matter most. That is how control is maintained and turned into outcomes ashore, not presence for its own sake (U.S. Navy et al., 2020; Gilday, 2022). Corbett's concept of enough control still fits, local and timely command to pass force, interdict sea lines, or enforce blockade while denial makes enemy moves costly (Till, 2018). Also account for the rising potency of sea-denial tools that let weaker powers contest control, planning to fight for control while absorbing denial pressures (Vego, 2011).

References

- Gilday, M. M. (2022). Chief of Naval Operations navigation plan 2022. Department of the Navy.
- Till, G. (2018). *Seapower: A guide for the twenty-first century* (4th ed.). Routledge.

U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, & U.S. Coast Guard. (2020). Advantage at sea: Prevailing with integrated all-domain naval power.

Vego, M. (2011). Introduction to naval warfare. U.S. Naval War College.

Professor Feedback

Jeff,

Meets Expectations. Good work covering the question and responses.

The main point I wanted to see was that Sea Control is at best transitory and temporary. You can gain it, but you can't maintain it without tremendous, sustained effort. The secondary point was that in constricted seas and/or choke points, Air and Land forces play a substantial role. Therefore Sea Control becomes a Joint Force effort. Good use of OPO ashore throughout.