

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT – 63rd Congress – ERSA – 2024 – Ilha Terceira – Açores**

**Special Session – Maritime Regions. Europe Hot Spots**

**Title: International (In)security and the Role of the Navy: possible limits for deterrence in the context of the Red Sea**

**Author: José Lúcio**

**Affiliation: NOVA FCSH/CICS – NOVA**

[jmrl@fcsb.unl.pt](mailto:jmrl@fcsb.unl.pt)

**Extended Abstract**

**Extended Abstract – English**

**1. Objective**

In the current context, insecurity and instability in maritime routes that are fundamental to global trade and prosperity are growing. The serious events in the Red Sea deserve particular attention, with the disruption of the safety of commercial maritime traffic in this crucial axis for merchant marine navigation. Thus, recalling the words of geostrategist Klaus Peter Saalbach, the concept of "Great Game" involves guaranteeing safe routes for supplying raw materials and energy sources and accessing strategic markets, even against competitors or enemies. Thus, and in the face of the insecurity that is progressively being installed in the context of commercial navigation, there is an appeal to the capabilities of navies in being able to guarantee that the seas and oceans remain safe spaces and open to communication between continents and nations. The fundamental objectives of this communication are, on the one hand, to read the most recent contributions relating to the role of navies in this context of growing insecurity and, on the other hand, to propose a reflection on the effective deterrence capabilities of Western navies in the context of responding to some specific security challenges, like the one that we currently seeing in the Red Sea. We believe that at the present time, and in view of the growing insecurity in the field of maritime transport (already having an impact on

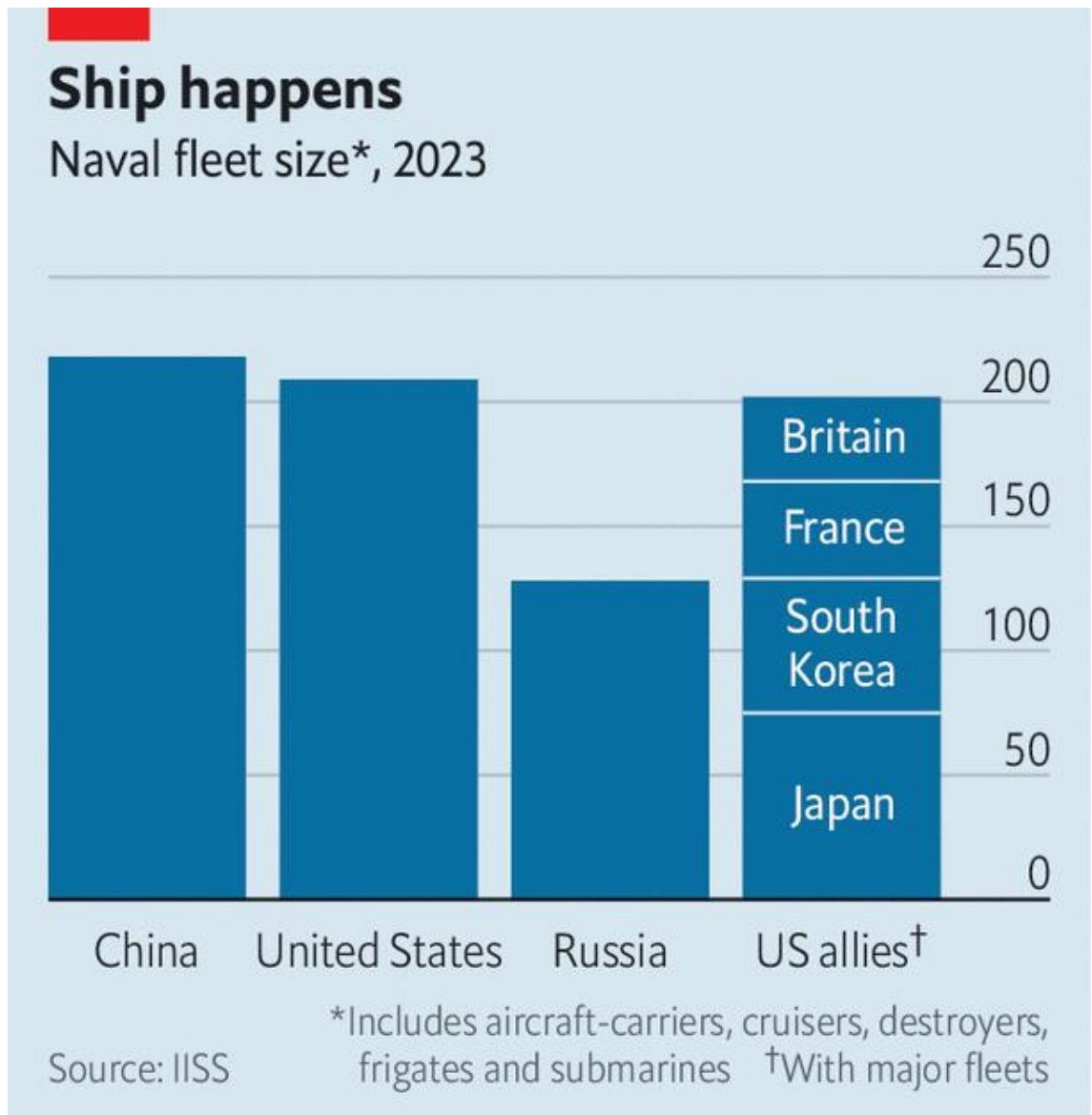
tariffs, which could have undesirable implications in the sphere of price stability) it is necessary to reflect on the deterrent capacity of Western States. Authors such as Michael Mazarr or James Andrew Lewis have been drawing attention to the need to determine the extent to which non-state entities are effectively sensitive to deterrence exercised by Western military/political means. This point is particularly relevant if we think that the Red Sea corresponds to a fundamental axis of connection and access to highly relevant spaces for the international economy. This way, and in the context of the communication, we will refer to authors (such as Robert Harkavy or Geoffrey Kemp) who have produced analyzes within the framework of so-called “Strategic Geography” (a branch of Geography dedicated to the study of access to areas vital for the security and prosperity of nations) since, in the context of our communication, the territories encompassed in what is generally called the “Middle East” correspond to crucial spaces for the security and enrichment of a very large number of countries.

## **2. Methods and Data**

In the context of this paper, we will use as main sources of data, for one hand, the analysis of different perspectives from several authors that have dedicated their research to the issue of deterrence, rational actor, strategic geography and the role of navy in the context of refrain a potential competitor from assuming an aggressive stance and, from the other hand, the available statistics concerning navy capacities and engagement in different deterrence/compellence initiatives. It is possible to conclude that nowadays there is a vast military investment in navy capabilities, particularly in countries like China and South Korea (see figure 1). The old ideas of *Mahanian Geopolitics* seem to return once again (Khan, 2023). No matter how much high speed railways and other continental transport facilities are built, the vast majority of trade continued to depend on maritime routes and shipping: according to UNCTAD, “*Maritime transport is still the backbone of international trade and the global economy - over 80% of the volume of international trade in goods is carried by sea, and the percentage is even higher for most developing countries*” (UNCTAD, Review of Maritime Transport 2021). It is possible to conclude that safe maritime routes are a crucial key to a

solid and successful geoeconomic strategy. It is enough to say that an estimated 12% of global trade passes through the Red Sea every year, worthing more than \$1tn. All this being said, it is now easier to understand the military displacement of navy ships towards this strategic part of the Middle East. In order to obtain a wider understanding of the issues that are at stake with the present paper, it is our intention to launch a little series of interviews both with navy officers and with experts on the fields of deterrence and strategic geography.

Figure 1 – Naval Fleet Size, 2023



### 3. Conclusions

So far, the main conclusions that we were able to figure out can be divided into three different levels of analysis:

- 3.1. In terms of rational actor and its sensitivity to deterrence (an issue that is highly complex considering the nature of the Houthis ethnic group) it is possible to argue that *“The rise of non-state actors with the power to influence global events has posed a challenge to the traditional understanding of the state system. Some of these non-state organisations possess military capabilities or the ability to inflict violence. A debate continues, however, over whether such groups can be deterred by military, economic, political or ethical means* (Roberts, Peter and Hardie, Andrew, 2023: 24). This way, one must consider that the Michael Quinlan’s perspective over “rational actor” might need an adjustment (Gerson, 2009), particularly when the group that an organized state must deter, acts outside the usual standard norms of military engagement. We can find in here the old problem of symmetry vs asymmetry, where a more powerful agent, is unable to gain definite advantage over an enemy that uses asymmetry strategies to resist and overcome its main weaknesses.
  
- 3.2. Where strategic geography is concerned, one must take into consideration that this particular branch of geographical science *“relates to the access to, exploitation of, or control over spatial areas of strategic importance to nations and since it directly influences national security and prosperity this endeavour has resulted in competition, tension, and conflict”* (Wooding, 2023). This way, the Red Sea is considered as a specific *maritime choke point* where sea routes are concerned (Harkavy, 2003). Unsurprisingly, United States and United Kingdom have been launched a series of attacks to deter and to destroy Houthis military infrastructure. Recent data, shown that, only on *“January 12th America and Britain launched strikes on over 60 [Houthi targets](#) in Yemen”* (The Economist, 2024, January, 12<sup>th</sup>). This set of data clearly demonstrates the attempt to regain

freedom of navigation in a crucial artery of world trade and to impose, at least at a certain extent the rule of law on territory known by its traditional instability (The Economist, 2024, January 12<sup>th</sup> ).

- 3.3. Finally, in terms of near future where maritime shipping is concerned, it is possible to argue that the houthis attacks created such a reality of “unsafe seas” that enterprises are now facing higher insurance premiums, possible legal problems and unpredictable delays. So, it's no surprise that shipping companies have decided, in many cases, to send their vessels elsewhere, mainly through Cape of Good Hope in South Africa (BBC Future, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2024). It will be challenging to follow the strategic options that both navy and merchant carriers will chose in years to come.

Keywords: Sailing, Security, Geostrategy, Deterrence, Strategic Geography.

## References:

### Books, Articles, Research Papers

Ayer, Robert (edit.) (2022) *Deterrence: Selected Articles from the Naval War College Review*, U.S. Naval War College, Newport Paper nº 46.

Boehlefeld,, Kathryn (2020) *Sticks and Stones: Nuclear Deterrence and Conventional Conflict*, JOURNAL OF INDO-PACIFIC AFFAIRS, WINTER 2020, pp. 77 – 88.

Carvalho, Virgílio (1982) *O Poder Marítimo*, Conferência proferida ao Curso de Defesa Nacional, no Instituto da Defesa Nacional, em 20 de Dezembro de 1982, subordinada ao tema «A Estratégia Militar e o Poder Marítimo».

Chalmers, Malcolm (2010) *Continuous at-sea Deterrence: costs and alternatives*, Royal United Services Institute. Briefing Note, July 2010.

Chau, Donovan (edit.) (2022) *Strategy Matters - Essays in Honor of Colin S. Gray*, Maxwell, Air University Press.

Dettmer, Jamie (2024) *Airstrikes are unlikely to deter the Houthis*, *POLITICO* Europe, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

Dias, Vanda Amaro et alii (2021) *A Participação de Portugal em Missões Internacionais como Eixo Estratégico de Política Externa, Nação e Defesa*, Agosto 2021, nº 159, pp. 119 – 150.

Diesen, Glenn (2015) *Inter-democratic security institutions and the security dilemma: a neoclassical realist model of the EU and NATO after the end of the Soviet Union*, *East European Quarterly* Vol. 43, No. 2-3, pp. 137-161, June-September 2015, Central European University.

Eaglen, Mackenzie and Walker, Dustin (2023) *American Deterrence Unpacked*, American Enterprise Institute.

Frederick, Bryan et alii. (2020) *Understanding the Deterrent Impact of U.S. Overseas Forces*, RAND Corporation.

George, Alexander and Smoke, Richard (1989) Deterrence and Foreign Policy, World Politics, Vol. 41, No. 2, January 1989, pp. 170-182, Published By: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Gerson, Michael (2009) Conventional Deterrence in the Second Nuclear Age, *Parameters*, pp. 32 – 48.

Gerson, Michael and Whiteneck, Daniel (2009) Deterrence and Influence: The Navy's Role in Preventing War, CAN Analysis and Solutions.

Harkavy, Robert (2001) Strategic Geography and the Greater Middle East, Naval War College Review, Autumn 2001, Vol. LIV, No. 4.

Horschig, Doreen and Adamopoulos, Nicholas (2023) Conventional-Nuclear Integration to Strengthen Deterrence, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

House of Commons Library (2024) UK and international response to Houthis in the Red Sea, Commons Library Research Briefing, 29 January 2024.

Kang, Tian (2022) The Failing Naval Deterrence and the Understated Proneness to War between China and the United States, Committee on International Relations, The University of Chicago.

Kemp, Geoffrey and Harkavy, Robert (1997) Strategic Geography and the Changing Middle East, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1997, pp. 13–5.

Khan, Aamir and Durrani, Aqsa (2023) Theoretical and Operational Framework of Geo-economics: Some Insights on US, China, Russia and India, International Journal of Human and Society, Vol. 3, N°4 (October-December 2023), pp. 270 – 279.

Kleveman, Lutz (2003) The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia, London, Atlantic Books.

Knopf, Jeffrey (2013) Rationality, Culture and Deterrence, PASSC, Report Number 2013 009.

Lewis, James Andrew (2016) Rethinking Deterrence: a Report for the Brzezinski Institute on Geostrategy, may 2016.

Lynch, Thomas and Saunders, Phillip (2020) Contemporary Great Power Geostrategic Dynamics: Relations and Strategies, National Defense University Press, Strategic Assessment 2020.

Mazarr, Michael (2018) Understanding Deterrence, RAND Corporation, Perspective.

Medcalf, Rory et alii (edits) (2020) The Future of the Undersea Deterrent: A Global Survey, Indo-Pacific Strategy Series, Australia, National Security College.

Okonjo-Iweala, Ngozi (2023) Why the World Still Needs Trade - The Case for Reimagining—Not Abandoning—Globalization, Foreign Affairs, July/August 2023.

Pinto, Gerhard Costa (2015) China and India's Maritime Geostrategies: Implications for International Maritime Security and Scenarios for 2030, ISCSP, Universidade de Lisboa.

Roberts, Peter and Hardie, Andrew (2015) The Validity of Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century, RUSI, Occasional Paper, August 2015.

Russell, James and Johnson Thomas (2022) Strategy and Nuclear-Conventional Integration for the United States Navy, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey.

Saalbach, Klaus Peter (2017) Modern Geostrategy: Methods and Practice, University of Osnabrück, Working Paper, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017.



Sloan, Geoffrey (2017) *Geopolitics, geography and strategic history*, Routledge, Abingdon, UK.

Stöhs, Jeremy (2014) *Intelligence and Deterrence at Sea*, *Journal for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2014), pp. 73-91.

Supta, Goh See Joo (2022) *Deterrence Strategies – Application and Viability*, Pointer, *Journal of the SAF*.

Tertrais, Bruno (2015) *How Relevant is Nuclear Deterrence Today?* *Nação e Defesa*, nº 140, pp. 10 – 24.

Unal, Beyza et alii (edits) (2020) *Perspectives on Nuclear Deterrence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, International Security Programme, Chatham House.

UNCTAD, *Review of Maritime Transport 2021*.

U.S. Department of Defense (2022) *National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*.

Wirtz, James (2018) *How Does Nuclear Deterrence Differ from Conventional Deterrence?* *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter 2018, pp. 58 – 75.

Wooding, Pete (2023) *Space as a Strategic Geography*, Air and Space Power Centre, *Air/Space Vol. 2*, BP31693322.

Zagare, Frank (1990) *Rationality and Deterrence*, *World Politics*, Volume 42, Issue 2, January 1990, pp. 238 – 260, Published By: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Zhongying, Pang (2020) *From Tao Guang Yang Hui to Xin Xing*, *Trends in Southeast Asia*, ISEAS, Issue 7, 2020.

## **Newspapers**

**BBC Future, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2024**

**The Economist, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2024** - Article WELCOME TO THE NEW ERA OF GLOBAL SEA POWER The Economist, January 11 th 2024.