

## THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF US NAVAL CAPABILITY IN HOLLYWOOD FILMS

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### ABSTRAK

Tersebar di seluruh dunia dan memiliki mobilitas yang sangat tinggi, Angkatan Laut AS adalah salah satu instrumen militer utama yang digunakan untuk mencerminkan kekuatan Amerika Serikat. Karya film Hollywood merupakan salah satu titik unggul kekuasaan lunak (*softpower*) budaya Amerika Serikat. Angkatan Laut AS banyak tampil dalam karya film Hollywood dari awal produksi perfilman tersebut. Namun, tidak banyak literatur akademik yang menelaah karya film tersebut sebagai sarana konstruksi sosial mengenai citra yang menyangkut Angkatan Laut AS. Penelitian ini menggunakan ilmu sosial interpretatif dan konstruktivisme untuk mengeksplorasi tema-tema yang ada dalam film-film bergenre angkatan laut. Karya tulis ini juga bertujuan untuk menunjukkan bahwa karya-karya tersebut mendukung pencitraan Angkatan Laut AS sebagai kesatuan yang sangat kompeten dan gesit dalam menjalankan tugas dengan nilai moral. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini berusaha menunjukkan efek konstitutif bagi penonton dari film-film tersebut, dan bagaimana hal ini dapat menunjang pencitraan antar-subyektif antara Angkatan Laut dan penonton.

**Kata Kunci:** Konstruktivisme, Kekuatan, Angkatan Laut AS

### ABSTRACT

The US Navy has become of the primary arms of US power projection, deployed worldwide and possessing high mobility. On the other hand, Hollywood cinema has been one of the hallmarks of US cultural soft power. During the time that Hollywood cinema has existed, the US Navy has appeared multiple times within the film art form. However, almost no literature exists that seek to examine these films are vessels for the social construction of ideas around the US Navy. This research uses interpretive social science and constructivism to explore the themes contained within naval films. It argues that these films help construct an image of a mobile and highly competent navy serving a righteous cause. It also argues the constitutive effects the film has on its audience.

**Keywords:** Constructivism, Soft Power, US Navy

### Background

When talking about the reach and influence of the United States as that of a great power, one cannot understate the important role that its military plays. Of the five branches of the US Armed Forces, the Navy plays a role like no other in providing the incredible capacity to attack and defend in multiple theatres throughout the world. The Pacific Battles of World War 2 proved the Navy's ability to project the US' strength some 7000 miles from its homeland; an advantage post-war US pressed as competition with the USSR began. " (Bradford, 2016, p. 260-261). As of 2019, it boasts a force of 289 warships

deployed worldwide and field ten carrier groups in the worlds three major oceans (U.S. Department of Navy, 2019).

Against this backdrop of the US Navy's role in US Foreign Policy, Hollywood has created many stories. These stories range from horror to romance to action and intrigue. These stories whether meaning to or by coincidence propagate different ideas that shape public opinion of America and the US Navy. The images from the movies construct the ideas of the powerful capabilities of the United States. The importance of these themes lies within the concepts of identity and ideas that predicate the actions of states and societies. Alexander Wendt stresses these precepts in his Social

Theory of International relations: laying the foundation for constructivism's examination of idea-creation through social interaction (Wendt, 1999).

To analyse the themes and ideas found in portrayal of US Naval capabilities and propose the construction that occurs therein this research asks: (i) How are the US Navy's capabilities portrayed in Hollywood Cinema? (ii) In what ways, does Hollywood Cinema construct the US identity as a superpower and ideas of powerful naval capabilities?

### Literature Review

The 20th Century demonstrated that the use of Seapower and Great Power status goes hand-in-hand. Colin S. Gray offers that into the 20th Century, US Seapower lends it the ability to be mobile, while its addition of sea-based air power also allows great navies to penetrate targets in-land (Gray, 1994). Once in this position of primacy, Stephen M Walt pointed out how the US strived to provide security for its allies and the liberal world order (Walt 2002). This commitment to protect its allies and interests globally translates to the choices made in its defense acquisition; Robert C. Rubel points to the F35 and LCS programs as shift to include policing as well as war-fighting scenarios (Rubel, 2016).

As this paper engages with ideas of Pop-Culture it must also examine the trends that exists in media, Michelle C. Pautz and Megan K. Warnement handily points out the positive depiction of the US Armed forces in American Cinema vis-à-vis other federal organizations unfavourable (Pautz, 2013).

Yet, examinations into the how the idea of military power constructed and what exactly gives military equipment its weight is a relatively unexplored field of international relations research. Of the few examinations, Robert R. Ross inspects how advancing naval capability is as much tied to nationalist narratives as it is to national security (Ross, 2018). Joelen Pretorius on the other hand, analyses how the language of national security is used to create and

reinforce the identity of its users (Pretorius, 2008).

### Constructivism

Understanding the impact that cultural artefacts such as movies have upon the world of international relations lends much to the IR school of constructivism. The schools of thought in Constructivism pursues not only knowledge in IR but also how that knowledge came to be. In the words of Emanuel Adler, "constructivism is a social theory about the role of knowledge and knowledgeable agents in the constitution of social reality" (Adler, 2015, p. 114).

This theory of international relations assumes knowledge is socially created and communicated constantly. It establishes that beneath the material objects that populate the world is ideas that dictate how actors view those objects—as opposed to realists who take material objects at their face value. The way in which humans view and think of object matters as much as the objects themselves, "constructivists hold that normative or ideational structures are just as important as material structures" (Reus-Smit, 2016, p. 196). It is these ideas that sublimates into the motivations and behaviour of state and non-state actors, as the way they view the world affects their actions. Moreover, constructivism iterates the importance of studying the ways in which these ideas are created and then communicated:

How agents perceive the world is important in explaining their actions, and they always have an element of choice in defining their identities and interests. However, in addition to idealism, a key feature of constructivism is holism or structuralism, the view that social structures have effects that cannot be reduced to agents and their interactions. Among these effects is the shaping of identities and interests, which are conditioned by discursive formations--by the distribution of ideas in the system--as well as by material forces, and as such are not formed in a vacuum. (Wendt, 199, p. 137)

By studying the process by which ideas are formed and communicated, it allows for a better understanding of identities: ideas that actors hold regarding themselves. These identities can in turn act as a guide for normative behaviour: what is acceptable or unacceptable for an actor to do. Deeper still, when these ideas work in tandem with actor ideas about other actors, these patterns of behaviour over time reinforce the ideas that they are born from. These cycles of idea creation and reinforcement is what Alexander Wendt calls cultures and can come to define entire eras of International Relations (Wendt, 1999).

#### Soft and Smart Power

Having established the importance of constructivist ideas of identity, ideas, and culture; Nye's idea of Soft power, and Smart Power are important to laying the groundwork for this research. Nye highlights the distinction between Hard and Soft power as the effect or push and pull: "soft power is the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes" (Nye, 2011, p. 20). The same resources that a state uses to coerce (Hard Power) can also be used to co-opt (soft power). The distinction often lies not with the resources used, but recipients' perception.

There should first be a distinction between Culture as stated by Constructivist Alexander Wendt which refers to normative behaviour of international actors. Culture as stated by Joseph Nye in his 2004 book refers to works of creations of art, music, or Popular Culture produced by a certain nation or population (Nye, 2004). He cites examples of books, music, and movies that can carry political messages across the border, and even into countries who consider themselves opposed to the United States.

Finally, Nye reiterates that a 'smart' state would be one that employs the right balance of Hard and Soft power. His train of thought is that the constant use of coercive power will not always work, and that Hard power has its limits. Nye posits that this is the

type of balance that the United States needs to strike as a world power (Nye, 2011).

#### New Public Diplomacy

New Public Diplomacy as iterated by Jan Melissen, expands its assumptions to include non-state actors in the efforts of diplomacy, "it does not see public diplomacy, or indeed diplomacy in general, as a uniquely stately activity, even though it stresses the practice of states" (Melissen, 2005, p. 12). It expands to include and study NGOs organisations, but also proponents of arts, music, movies, and other aspects of pop-culture in its ability to delivery of information (Schneider, 2005)

New Public diplomacy also views the distinction between information intended for domestic audience and that intended for the foreign public to be less relevant in a freer communication age (Melissen, 2005). A state's ability to compartmentalize or keep consistent is less and less relevant in the age of an internet that connects the publics of different states so easily.

#### Great Powers

While statistical data has played a large part in determining and justifying the great power status in the study of international relations, this research relies on a constructivist approach to the concept of great powers and its hegemonic practices. Going back to the constructivist concept of international relations as the creation and interaction of ideas, great powers can be boiled down to the interaction of one state and another based on a common idea of 'power'. Constructivism deals more with states' "behaviour and identity of material inequality in two international systems, one in which material dominance is recognized by subordinate states as constituting certain rights and responsibilities on the part of dominant states, and one in which it is not" (Wendt, 1999, p. 176). This paper approaches the process of idea construction and dissemination through the interpretive methods using based upon theory of Constructivism. ) The focus of the analysis is the communication and social interaction

around these films. The focus of the study is not the causal impact of the films, but constitutive nature of the films. Data is collected through secondary sources of books, journals, government statements, and the movies themselves. Data from the US Navy and the US Department of Defense serves both to paint the current condition of the US Navy as well as to shed light to the role they played in the creation of the naval films. The contents of these films were analysed to highlight any recurring themes that appears throughout the different films as well as corresponding to the state of the US Navy.

This research first explained the movies, describing the films' characters, setting, and plot to give a clear image of the narrative conveyed therein. Each description was followed by a brief exploration of the narratives conveyed by the film. Then the research will list all of the main recurring themes found across all of the films. Finally, the research explains the connection between the US Navy and the themes of the film and how the communication of ideas take place. The theory and discussions brought by books and other international relations literature serves to justify the connection between the themes and the US Navy.

#### The NAVY Mission

As of 2018 Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson states the Navy's mission as the following:

"The United States Navy will be ready to conduct prompt and sustained combat operations at sea. Our Navy will protect America from attack, promote American prosperity, and preserve America's strategic influence. U.S. naval operations—from the seafloor to space, from the blue water to the littorals, and in the information domain—will deter aggression and enable resolution of crises on terms acceptable to the United States and our allies and partners. If deterrence fails, the Navy will conduct decisive combat operations to defeat any enemy." (Richardson, 2016, p. 1)

It executes this mission with a fleet numbering 289 ships with 91 being deployed

at any single moment. This fleet is made of the Aircraft Carriers, Amphibious Assault Ships, Cruisers, Destroyers, Littoral Combat Ships, and Submarines (US Navy, 2019). Serving in the Navy are 49,897 Personnel and 40,900 Marines in a broad range of roles including command, combat, intelligence, logistics, and so on. History is rife with the actions of the US Navy from its crucial role in World War 2, Korean War, Vietnam War, and the War on Terror.

In the current day, the Navy views its task to defend American interest and their area of operations encompasses the globe (Richardson, 2016). The way the US assesses opportunities and threats around the globe, implies both its wide reach and its willingness to operate around the world.

#### Films Portraying the US Navy

Each film selected for this paper involves the US Navy as a crucial part of the plot. All the films involve Navy personnel as characters, and their actions help advance the plot. In all the films, the Navy plays an important role in solving a crisis. Each of these films were also made with the assistance of the US Navy in some form or another.

The other metric used to filter out movies used in this research, was the worldwide earning of the films. The five films were selected based on being top earning films in their era. For the purposes of this research films that depicted the US Navy previous of the second world war were also disqualified. As discussed in previous section, the US Navy did not come into prominence until the end of the second world war which saw both higher US ship production and the waning of the British Royal Navy.

It should be noted that even the measurement of the films income still cannot fully explain the reach and effect these films have on the general public. As this paper will argue later, the focus of this research is in the themes found in the films and the image the constructed. The goal of this research is to explore how the constitutive impact of the

film not necessarily to measure its causal impact on the world.

Lifted from a Tom Clancy Novel of the same name, this *The Hunt for Red October* follows the character of Jack Ryan, a CIA analyst and former-Marine Corps officer who facilitates the defection of Capt. Marko Ramius, the captain of Soviet Ballistic Missile Submarine. The movie follows a cat-and-mouse chase between the US and Soviet Subs as both fleets race to catch the defecting submarine, and ends with the successful defection of Ramius and his officers.

The film *Crimson Tide* follows Lt. Cmdr. Ron Hunter and the crew of the USS Alabama, a Ohio-Class Ballistic Missile Submarine during a nuclear standoff. When malfunction leaves the Alabama unable to receive orders, the crew must decide between launching their nuclear missiles or withholding fire.

Unlike the rest of the movies in this paper, *Captain Phillips* is an account of the real-life 2009 Maersk Alabama hijacking. The film follows the hijacking and Phillips' subsequent hostage situation, and his eventual rescue by Navy SEALs aboard the USS Bainbridge.

In *Battleship*, the primary plot centers around the Lt. Alex Hopper and the crew of the USS John Paul Jones during an alien invasion of the island of Hawaii. Hopper and his is cut off from the main fleet and must repel the invasion against the more advanced aliens. After multiple battles, they successfully defeat the aliens in a standoff using the world war 2 era battleship the USS Missouri.

*Top Gun* follows the journey of Pete "Maverick" Mitchell, who is a candidate at the Naval Fighter Weapons School also known as TOPGUN. Throughout the course of his training Maverick learns not only to be a good pilot but to work as a team. Films ends with Maverick successfully saving his wingman from a squadron of Soviet jets.

## **Films Themes**

### **Mobility**

In the realm of IR, one of the indicators of great power ability is the ability to deploy its military with great speed and scope. Beyond the realm of IR scholarship however, Mobility can be perceived by the general public as not just being able to deploy anywhere quickly, but due the lack of knowledge they have regarding the strategy and processes leading up to deployment, they may believe that the US is simply 'everywhere'. Films can display the mobility of the US Navy in both explicit and implicit ways. Whether the films describe the Navy's mobility in implicit or explicit ways, they subtly present the idea of viewing the worlds as one single area of operations. These subtly share the same view point the US' National Defense Strategy and Design for Maritime Superiority has; one in which the Navy's mission allows it to operate anywhere on the international stage. (Department of Defense, 2018) (Richardson, 2016)

Mobility can be explicitly conveyed simply by the display of the Navy forces in various locations around the globe. Some films show the Navy as being already deployed in critical locations. *Captain Phillips* show the USS Bainbridge as already being on anti-piracy patrols in the region, needing only to travel 150 nautical miles to assist the hostage situation. *The Hunt for Red October* on the other hand shows the USS Dallas doing patrols near the Russian Naval base in Polyarny, thanks to this Jack Ryan is able receive the crucial information needed to track down the submarine. Once Ryan has the intelligence and formulated a plan, he is able to get across the Atlantic with the help of the Navy's fleet of carriers, planes, and helicopters. In the climax of *Topgun*, Maverick and his squadron of pilots must deploy from their base in Miramar California to a crisis in Indian Ocean; they are shown as being able to arrive on the scene as handle the situation within 24 hours. Mirroring this, the Navy SEALs in *Captain Phillips* are also shown as being capable of travelling from the Naval Air Station in Virginia to Somali waters in 24 hours. Without this extensive and global network of

ships, the protagonists of these films would not be able to get to their respective points of conflict.

The second aspect contained within these films that convey a sense of mobility, is delivered through a more subtle technique. In addition to having its ships and personnel deployed world-wide, Cinema can make this sentiment even more potent through use of time. Filmmakers often use editing techniques to cut around events and time that would weaken the narrative of the film. At the same time, the audience have gotten used to this form of lean story-telling that cuts around the 'mundane' every day. In the films mentioned in this research, different methods are used but the effect is the same: time is not a linear portrayal of events as they happen minute by minute. Instead, they follow the rise and fall of narrative tension.

This treatment of time allows the US Navy to be depicted as forces that are able to get to where they are needed just in time. Often this is explicitly conveyed via dialogue that mentions a need for haste or timestamp displaying the passage of time. Equally as effective however, are the implicit ways that the editors cut the film to circumvent the passage of time. This technique can be subtle to the point where the audience do not realise the cutting of time, all they know is that the characters, i.e. the Navy, arrives on the scene just as they are needed.

Captain Phillips uses both editing techniques and the narrative of the story, so as to depict the USS Bainbridge arriving just as the pirates begin to distrust Phillips and threaten his life. Similarly, the arrival of the Navy SEALs happens just as tension between Phillips and the Pirates arrive again. The SEALs are able to enter the negotiation and deescalate the threat to Phillips life. In Battleship, Hopper is able to revive the USS Missouri and get under way within the span of several minutes, arriving just in time to destroy the alien's communication array and save the planet. It shows the process of decommissioning the WWII-era battleship in short montage that lasts only several

minutes, allowing them to arrive on scene just in time. Following the climax of the film, Navy fighter aircraft are able to arrive and finish off the aliens just as the USS Missouri is about to be destroyed. The Hunt for Red October does away with this montage technique, instead interspersing scenes of Jack Ryan traveling across the Atlantic with the scenes of other characters. It creates the illusion that Ryan and the Navy is a swift force, by cutting out the process by which he travels and only showing him arriving on the scene just in time. It should be noted that the Crimson Tide is an exception to this point, it portrays the USS Alabama traveling over a period of two-weeks from its station in Bangor, Washington to its area of operations off the Kamchatka peninsula.

### **Competence**

It seems superfluous to say that a military force needs to be competent at its job. However, instilling in the audience that the US Navy excels at the tasks it faces serves an important task of public diplomacy. No public wants a military force to be deployed around the world if it does not know how to do its job. Moreover, the display of the competence of the US Navy can leave a good impression on the audience, especially those who are far removed from the actual implementation of force.

Competence can manifest in different forms in cinema. One aspect of that is technical competence, this can be defined as the Navy's expert use of various powerful and high-tech equipment. The other is relational competence: this is the amount of discipline and professionalism with which Navy personnel treat each other and officers in the chain of command.

Professionalism and discipline often take centre stage in the depiction of Navy Personnel. In The Hunt for Red October, Crimson Tide, and Captain Phillips, Navy Personnel are depicted in clean and neat garb, speak in clear and succinct terms, as well as having a respect for the chain of command. Orders carried out within a ship

are quickly understood and then followed to. *Crimson Tide* problematizes some aspects of this, by placing the officers of the Alabama in a morally ambiguous situation. Yet, it also highlights that the actions Cmdr. Hunter as being in accordance with Navy Regulation. His actions are to thank for avoiding nuclear war at the climax of the film, showing that the system of regulations and chain of command the Navy has in place is capable of triumphing over the flaws of rogue individuals. Films like *Topgun* and *Battleship*, approach the idea of professionalism and discipline in a different manner. Both present a main protagonist that exhibits high skill yet is reckless and undisciplined. The films then present the Navy and situations encountered therein as the crucible by which the characters are made into responsible and disciplined individuals. Hopper in *Battleship* learn to respect the opinions of his peers and lead by being selfless and courageous in the face of danger. In *Topgun*, Maverick learns to prioritise the needs of his wingmen above his own goals through his experience in training and by the guidance of CDR. Metcalf, the head instructor of *Topgun*. These movies communicate that the Navy is a professional and disciplined organization, is also capable of instilling those virtues in others.

Secondly, competence is communicated by the Navy's deft use and clear understanding of their equipment. The most obvious examples of this is that all these movies have a 'happy' ending: in which the Navy is able to accomplish the goals it has set out to do. Less obviously, these films also show the Navy use a wide variety of vehicles and weapons systems effectively. The most impressive example is the depiction of the SEALs assault using 3 simultaneous sniper shots to save the life of Captain Phillips. Meanwhile, *Battleship* shows off the wide range of ships the US Navy brings to the RIMPAC exercises, as well as the technical capability of the veterans in being able to revive and fight with the USS Missouri. In the *Hunt for Red October*, the Sonar Operator of USS Dallas is able to discern the

class of the Red October. He also able to deduce the direction of the Red October using the few clues he has obtained--without this, Ryan may not have been able to find and facilitate the defection of the Red October. The entire premise of *Topgun* built upon the Navy's own Strike Fighter Tactics Instructor program, which selects pilots from the frontline to train. The film establishes that *Topgun* selects the best navy pilots and trains them further. The main protagonist Maverick, demonstrates this early on as being one of the few pilots of have a close encounter with a Soviet MiG. Moreover, at the climax of the film, Maverick proves himself by tipping the balance of the dogfight and repelling a squadron of five MiGs.

### **Righteousness**

The final important element of the image that is being created regarding the Navy is the righteousness of the force. It cannot be understated how important it is for the audience to understand that the Navy forces is a force for good. That it seeks to defend civilian and it fights 'evil', whether it comes in the form of a malignant rival power, or a rogue element. The Navy must not only be a dominant force in the oceans, but a force that benevolently defends the right of all nations to use the oceans.

Setting the impression of righteousness for the audience is not a simple matter of who is the 'good guy' and who is the 'bad guy'. Movies must convince the audience of the 'morality' of the characters. They must display not only the propensity for using military force, but also restraint in using that force until diplomacy and negotiation has failed and such force is indeed justified. This righteousness can also be portrayed in the way Navy personnel treats civilians and surrendered enemy combatants. Such depictions usually show that the Navy have respect for due process and human rights. These movies tend to distance itself from the cases of torture, civilian casualties, and other human rights violations. Relating to previous

section on professionalism of the Navy; they also portray the equal treatment of personnel, regardless of age, gender, or race.

This is apparent most in Captain Phillips, where the US Navy's forces serve multiple roles in the rescue of Captain Phillips. The film highlights the role of the Captain of the USS Bainbridge, the first ship to catch up with the Captain Phillips and begin to negotiate for Phillips' release. The Navy displays both concern for the safety of Captain Phillips, as well as restraint in the face of a crisis. Captain Phillips shows the more diplomatic side of Navy Personnel, with violence being displayed mostly by the pirates in the film. The Navy does not use military force until the very end of the movie, where the life of Captain Phillips is in imminent danger.

In *The Hunt for Red October*, Navy Officers are often thoughtful, deliberating men who take the advice of their subordinates in order to make the best decisions possible. In this film, whose plot revolves around intelligence and counter-intelligence, the character of Captain Mancuso carefully considers the intelligence provided to him by his crew. He empowers his crew instead of domineering over them. He also carefully negotiates with the Capt. Ramius as he intends to defect from the Soviet Union--choosing to think the best of this adversary instead of the worst. In a conversation with Ramius, the XO of the *Red October* talks about the freedoms he would be afforded by living in the US, citing it as one of the reasons for defecting.

In *Crimson Tide*, the film does a very sombre take on the use of nuclear weapons, great power rivalry, and Mutually Assured Destruction. The fate of the world depend on the crew of the USS *Alabama*, as they must choose whether or not to launch a nuclear strike on Russia. The character of Cmdr. Hunter, shows not only a deft hand at command but also the ability to reason and--once again--show restraint from the use of force. His actions not only save the lives of his ship mates, but also prevent the US from mistakenly causing nuclear holocaust. His

character, through both dialogue and action, show a deep respect and caution for the power that comes from the use of nuclear weapons.

The social construction occurring within these film takes advantage of the general public's removal from the actual combat situations or even daily lives of US Navy personnel. These subtle nuances in the depiction of the US Navy contribute in shaping a positive image of them in the audience's eyes. These movies do not explicitly trumpet "the Navy is flawless, never question the navy!" Instead these films portray characters who are scrupulous in their treatment of their comrades, the enemy, and civilians. Their use of force often comes after exhausting diplomatic options and is done in accordance to the laws of war.

#### Implications

In this section, I will argue as to why the depiction of a strong Navy is important in bolstering the capability of the US to project a great-power military. These themes in these movies are indeed relevant to the behaviour of states, because these depictions are methods communication.

It does not matter if these movies are a work of fiction, because I argue that fiction is far more accessible to the public. Public understanding, both foreign and domestic, are far removed from the experience of actual combat or from the analysis of war games. Movies create a peculiar effect, for when societies and individuals try to deny the reality of the state, there is push back that substantiates the reality of the state. However, in this case, the government does not act against it, and in some cases, it is within the interest of the US not to deny the ideas found within these movies. If watching these movies elicits a patriotic response, for example the belief that the US can win a great power war with the Soviet Union, then it is not interest of the US to make themselves appear weak, nor is it possible for the US to engage in combat with the Soviet Union for the sake of proving this point.



By not denying the communication of these ideas, and in some cases even participating wholesale in the production process (Department of Defense, 2015), the US is admitting to the importance of the ideas contained within these films. The realists may argue here that Hollywood simply creating entertainment which is inconsequential to the US Navy. However, the participation of the DoD in Hollywood, runs against that the claim movies are inconsequential. Even military institutions such as the US Navy recognize the important role of being involved in the creation process of these films. For shoots of *The Hunt for Red October*, the Navy allowed the use of some of their submarine, hoping the display would be enough to boost the appeal of submarines to people enlisting (Haglund, 2013). Due to the connectedness of the modern world, this message is able to travel across the different publics of various countries—casting a wide net for the process of image construction to take place (Melissen, 2005).

All the more so, the fact that these movies are able to construct the reality of a US Navy that is stronger and more righteous than the Soviet Union, defies realists in the way that seemingly immaterial themes communicate better than the material forces of the Navy itself. The effect movies have are not causal in the sense that they can topple a rival great power, or that they magically make the US Navy better organization. They are constitutive, that is to say they add to the collective knowledge that defines the US Navy and defines the relationship the audience has with the US Navy. Wendt point to this as a process that occurs within a social structure when “individuals’ shared knowledge reproduces an Idea of the state as a corporate “person” or “group Self”” (Wendt, 1999, p. 218). Cinema in away allows for the Navy propagate the ideas about its capability and its character to the general public.

The role these films have are very similar to the military parades and Military exercises that Navies around the world carry

out. These demonstrations of material power can in fact run against common realist thought in the way these parades and exercises are carefully curated displays of power. Designed as a show of power, rather than an accurate demonstration of power; as accurate demonstration in this sense of involve actually engaging the enemy in combat or some manner of wargaming--both of the public is often not shown. Even in times of peace, these films can still serve as demonstrations of force. These films are also shows of power, albeit with the nuances that come with producing pop culture. All of these films seek to portray the capabilities of the US Navy at the time of its release. They go out of their way to pay military consultants and record with real-life military equipment.

Alongside power projection, the constitutive nature of the Naval Films help in solidifying the Navy’s image for the general public. It contextualizes the Navy’s role in US foreign policy, by placing them situations that the audience can easily see and understand.

These are effective tools especially when directed at the general public who are unfamiliar with the US Navy. Outside of the basic dictionary definitions of the word navy: “ the part of a country’s armed forces that fights at sea, and the ships that it uses;” (Oxford Learners Dictionary) any further ideas of the audience is fair game. In every film analysed here, the Navy plays the roles set by that definition. The narrative places Navy personnel in conflict situations where they use military force. After that, the films take it a step further by creating a context for the conflict; against other states, non-state actors, or fictional creatures. These stories establish that the US Navy is indeed capable of carrying this task successfully.

These films work on different levels for different audiences. By depicting the tools and methods of the US Navy, the films can either reinforce or create the ideas of the audience. Wendt provides us with a useful tool for helping break down the process of ‘social learning;’ by looking at the ‘idea-

baggage' the audience carries with them (Wendt, 1999). Firstly, to the uninformed public--those without prior information regarding the navy--these films encourage a certain way of thought. Despite being fiction, those seeing the depiction of the US Navy for the first time have no antithesis to bring to the discourse. Secondly to those who have prior ideas regarding the navy. Those who are already convinced of US Naval supremacy would see these movies as hypothetical shows of force not unlike the military parades and exercises previously discussed. For those who disagree, these films can serve as counterarguments. While Wendt emphasizes how difficult it is to challenge the a priori ideas of an actor, he also remarks that an actor with similar belief will more readily accept facts presented to them.

Wendt highlights this process, "It is a core tenet of interactionism that people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meaning of those objects have for them, and these meanings stem from how situations are understood" (Wendt, 1999). This process happens when two actors (A and B) interact with each other. To simplify Wendt,

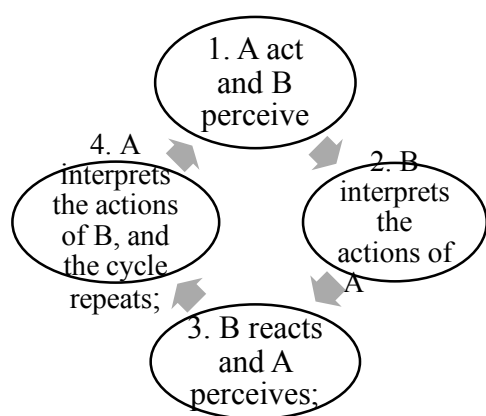


Figure 4.2.1 Wendt's process of Intersubjectivity.

Assuming that both A and B already possess ideas of each other prior to this, then at every step of this process their interaction is either changing or reinforcing those ideas. Ideas that arise of how each actor should act

is what Wendt calls culture (Wendt 1999). The development of this culture is what occurs between the cinema and these films. Themes of Mobility, Competence, and Righteousness are acted out for the audience to witness, creating ideas of how the US Navy performs in the world. In this sense, A and B roles are interchangeable because in this process there rarely is a beginning point, rather it is a culture that self-feeds and self-propagates. The films maybe produced by the Navy to feed the general public a certain image. It also equally possible that it's the thoughts and images within the general public that feed into who the Navy perceive themselves to be.

Power and frequency also play a hand in how these ideas continue to propagate. Power here does not refer to the traditional IR sense, but relates to the relationship between actors A and B: it can refer to how actors influence the way they are perceived; it could also mean the process of incentivizing one particular way of seeing their interactions. In the context of these Naval Films, their power comes from their authoritative. These films shed light on combat situations, and the interactions of Navy personnel, decision making of officers--occurrences that the general public are removed from. Even more so in the case of foreign public viewers (Wendt, 1999).

Frequency factors into sustaining the culture of interaction between the audience and the naval films. Once a culture is established and the following interactions follow that expectation, this creates a self-fulfilling prophecy and these ideas are sustained (Wendt, 1999). These interactions will persist until the audience encounters a situation that do not fulfill their expectations. Yet again, the distance between the audience and the actions of the US Navy come into play. The US Navy often keeps the minute details of their operations as confidential, not to also mention that the US has not engaged in a Total War between great powers since the second world war. The frequency with which these films are accessible to the audience sustains the themes presented

within them, meanwhile the obscurity of antithetical ideas makes those existing themes even stronger.

### **Conclusion**

This research set out to study the relationship between the US Navy as it exists and juxtapose it against the depiction of the Navy in the eyes of a film audience. It set out to see the portrayal of US Navy capability in these naval movies.

By displaying various themes, the films are able to paint an image of the US Navy. These films paint a Navy with a high degree of mobility: possessing at once the capacity to reach various locations, in addition to already having ships and personnel stationed in strategic locations across the globe. The Navy employs and maintains personnel that are able to carry out their tasks well: servicemen and women who are responsible and competent, officers who are strategic and discerning, as well as a special

operations branch that are extremely effective in crisis situations. Above all, these films paint service members who act righteously: able to act with diplomacy, discernment, and a great respect for the use of deadly force.

These themes are displayed in a setting that helps contextualizes the actions of the US navy for the members of the public that are removed from the operations of the Navy, whether by distance, nationality, or security clearance. It sustains the idea of a strong US Navy to the general public.

This research recommends further exploration into the role of films in discourse regarding the military, and even other forms of government. The same method can be used to analyze, ideas being communicated by other governments' and what they are saying regarding their own countries; countries with growing films industries like India and the People's Republic of China come to mind.

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