

Asserting the freedom of navigation: Does the US go too far?

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Freedom of navigation operational assertions (FONAs) are assertive operations carried out mainly by the U.S. Navy when other nations impose what the U.S. considers excessive restrictions on the freedom of navigation anywhere in the world. Sent by the Pentagon through naval ships or aircrafts, FONAs demonstrate that the U.S. will not accept such restrictions and it is only in special areas that they require higher approval.

In a new article in *Armed Forces & Society*, researcher Amitai Etzioni discusses the dual nature of FONAs; while they are an important component of the liberal international order and essential to U.S. national security, they are also assertive in nature, overly used, and can easily escalate into dangerous clashes between nations. Indeed, the targets of these operations include not only less friendly nations such as China and Russia but also close allies such as Canada.

Through a four-part analysis of the U.S. use of FONAs, Etzioni finds that FONAs operate on a limited budget and personnel and are therefore less visible to the public and less subject to scrutiny. However, he concludes that FONAs should be a last-resort option instead of a first-step in an attempt to police navigation.

"The United states is a major naval power compared to other nations that either do not have much of a navy or rely much more on their land forces; hence, on the face of it, the unencumbered right to move forces about the seas advantages the United States," the researcher wrote.

"However, it does not follow that military assertions are the preferred way to ensure this [freedom](#), especially as the first step to counter what the United States views as excessive restrictions. Instead, moves such as operational assertions should serve as a fallback option should diplomatic steps and multilateral steps fail."

More information: "Freedom of Navigation Assertions: The United States as the World's Policeman," [afs.sagepub.com/content/early/ ... 27X15599635.abstract](https://www.afs.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/11/30/15599635.abstract)

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