

CHRISTOPHER H. SHARMAN

Captain, U.S. Navy (Retired)

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Active TS/SCI with Polygraph

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Christopher Sharman is an authority on China's maritime military development and Indo-Pacific security. As Director of the Naval War College's China Maritime Studies Institute (CMSI) — the U.S. government's dedicated research center on China's naval modernization — he leads a team of world-renowned scholars who analyze Chinese-language open-source materials to produce insights that inform the nation's most senior civilian and military decision-makers.

His expertise is grounded in three decades of firsthand experience at the intersection of naval operations, diplomacy, and intelligence across the Indo-Pacific. A retired U.S. Navy Captain, he has served in forward-deployed operational billets in Japan, as a defense attaché in both Beijing and Hanoi, and as a senior strategist at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. He is a prolific author published in leading outlets including Survival (IISS) and U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, a Congressional witness, and a sought-after expert in international media — including CNN, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Financial Times, The Economist, Handelsblatt, the Japan Times, Al Jazeera, and BBC — on China's naval ambitions, Taiwan Strait dynamics, and the strategic implications of China's expanding global maritime presence.

CURRENT POSITION

Director, China Maritime Studies Institute (CMSI)

November 2023 – Present

U.S. Naval War College | Newport, Rhode Island

Leading the Naval War College's dedicated research center on China's maritime military development, directing a team of world-renowned scholars who analyze Chinese-language open-source materials to produce analysis that informs senior U.S. decision-makers — including the National Security Council, National Intelligence Council, and Congress.

- Directs multiple CMSI publication series on China's naval modernization, Indo-Pacific security dynamics, and the strategic implications of China's expanding global maritime presence — all freely accessible to the public
- Hosted the 2025 CMSI Conference on the human dimensions of China's navy — an invitation-only gathering of leading experts examining PLA Navy recruitment, training, career progression, and retention
- Launched the CMSI Quarterly Review — a new publication series featuring translated Chinese-language military maritime articles and Director's analysis (4 issues, 2025–2026)
- Serves as Associate Professor, Naval War College

MILITARY CAREER

Thirty years as a U.S. Navy active-duty intelligence officer — from forward-deployed carrier operations in Japan to diplomatic postings in Beijing and Hanoi, from combat deployments in Iraq to advising the White House National Security Council on East Asia policy. The highlights below represent the most significant billets in a distinguished career spanning operational, diplomatic, intelligence, and strategic domains.

Senior Strategist & Deputy Director, National Intelligence Manager for East Asia 2020 – 2023

Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI)

- Served as the Intelligence Community's senior strategist for East Asia, advising the Director of National Intelligence and representing the IC at National Security Council and White House interagency policy meetings at the Senior Executive Service (SES) level
- Led the IC's strategic response during the Speaker of the House's visit to Taiwan (2022) and the Taiwan President's transit of the United States (2023), synchronizing efforts across all 18 Intelligence Community agencies
- Led a cross-functional team analyzing intelligence production data across the IC, resulting in multi-million dollar resource realignments to close critical intelligence gaps
- Orchestrated a major East Asia conference bringing together senior NSC, interagency, and IC leadership, producing initiatives that shaped IC priorities for years
- Strengthened bilateral and multilateral intelligence partnerships to maximize combined capabilities on the most challenging East Asia security issues

National Security Affairs Fellow

2019 – 2020

Stanford University's Hoover Institution

Competitively selected as a National Security Affairs Fellow at one of the nation's most respected policy research institutions on the Stanford University campus. Conducted original research on U.S. maritime strategy in the South China Sea, China's military maritime activities, the U.S.-Vietnam naval relationship, and the efficacy of soft power in the Indo-Asia-Pacific. Produced multiple publications during the fellowship year. Recipient of the 2021 Alfred Thayer Mahan Award for Literary Achievement for work produced during this period.

Navy Attaché, U.S. Embassy Hanoi

2016 – 2019

Vietnam

- Orchestrated every aspect of the first U.S. aircraft carrier visit to Vietnam in over 50 years — a milestone diplomatic and military event involving more than 6,000 personnel that opened the door to deeper, ongoing bilateral military cooperation
- Systematically built strategic relationships that enabled the U.S. Navy to increase the frequency of ship visits to Vietnam, strengthening trust and expanding military ties in a region where China's maritime assertiveness makes every partnership consequential
- Coordinated a 9-nation, 2,500-sailor humanitarian mission delivering 250 medical, disaster relief, engineering, and community engagement events across Vietnam

M.S. Student, National War College

2014 – 2015

National Defense University | Washington, D.C.

Distinguished Graduate. Recipient of the National Defense University President's Award for Excellence in Writing (2015). Recipient of the 2016 Alfred Thayer Mahan Award for Literary Achievement for work produced during this period.

Deputy Director of Intelligence (N2), U.S. Seventh Fleet

2012 – 2014

USS Blue Ridge (LCC-19) | Japan-based Forward Deployed Naval Forces

- Managed the Intelligence Directorate for the U.S. Navy's largest numbered fleet, providing analysis to the Seventh Fleet Commander on military and political developments across 36 Indo-Pacific maritime nations — including the world's five largest armed forces
- Led a 70-person intelligence directorate and coordinated with intelligence elements across six subordinate task forces
- Designed and implemented a new federated intelligence collection strategy spanning more than 30 ships and 100 aircraft, sharpening focus and improving collaboration across the Pacific intelligence enterprise
- Stood up a real-world 24/7 five-section intelligence watch by overseeing the qualification and training of 45 watch standers

Assistant Navy Attaché, U.S. Embassy Beijing

2009 – 2012

China | DoD Attaché of the Year, 2010–2011

- Served as a senior U.S. Navy representative in China, advising the U.S. Ambassador and country team on defense and security matters while maintaining direct working relationships with the Chinese Ministry of National Defense and the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)
- Produced strategic, operational, and tactical reporting on China's military developments that directly informed national-level U.S. foreign policy and defense strategy toward China
- Managed numerous high-level military exchange visits, facilitating new bilateral agreements and communication channels
- Built an extensive network of international defense attachés and regional partners, generating a multifaceted picture of China's military capabilities and intentions

Defense Intelligence Agency

2006 – 2008

Served in intelligence analysis and strategy roles, including a deployment to Baghdad, Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

U.S. Army Command and General Staff College

2005 – 2006

Completed joint professional military education. Formally designated as a U.S. Navy Strategist.

USS Kitty Hawk (CV-63)

2003 – 2005

Japan-based Forward Deployed Naval Forces

Intelligence officer assigned to the Japan-based strike group, participating in major combat operations in Iraq.

Joint Intelligence Center Pacific (JICPAC)

2000 – 2003

Served as China Advisor to the PACOM Commander during the 2001 EP-3 crisis — one of the most serious U.S.-China military confrontations of the post-Cold War era.

Naval Postgraduate School & Defense Language Institute

1997 – 2000

Completed M.A. in National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School. Graduated from the Defense Language Institute, Japanese (2000).

USS Independence (CV-62)

1994 – 1996

Japan-based Forward Deployed Naval Forces

Intelligence officer assigned to the carrier air wing embarked aboard USS Independence, stationed off the coast of Taiwan during the 1995–1996 China-Taiwan Crisis.

CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

U.S. House of Representatives

June 4, 2024

Committee on Homeland Security | Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security

Invited witness, hearing entitled "Combating the Gray Zone: Examining Chinese Threats to the Maritime Domain." Testified alongside witnesses from the Heritage Foundation and RAND Corporation.

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

1. Sharman, Christopher H. "China's Far-Seas Navy and the Logic of Global Presence." *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy (IISS)*, Vol. 68, No. 3, pp. 135–160, 2026.

Books, Monographs & Chapters

2. Sharman, Christopher H. "China Moves Out: Stepping Stones Toward a New Maritime Strategy." *Institute of National Strategic Studies, National Defense University*, April 2015.
3. Sharman, Christopher H. and Andrew S. Erickson "China's Future World-Class Navy: Ends, Ways, Means." *The PLA's Long March toward a World-Class Military, National Bureau of Asian Research*, October 2025.

Naval Institute Proceedings

4. Sharman, Christopher H. "Mao Goes Maritime." *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol. 152/5/1,479, May 2026. [Highlighted by USNI Proceedings editors as recommended reading for the U.S. Sea Services; syndicated by RealClearDefense, May 5, 2026]
5. Sharman, Christopher H. "Lessons from the First U.S. Carrier Visit to Vietnam." *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol. 146/6/1,408, June 2020.

CMSI China Maritime Reports

6. Sharman, Christopher H. and Terry Hess "PLAN Submarine Training in the 'New Era'." *China Maritime Report No. 34, China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College*, January 2024.

7. Sharman, Christopher H. and Andrew S. Erickson "Dirty But Preparing to Fight: VADM Li Pengcheng's Downfall Amid Increasing PLAN Readiness." *China Maritime Report No. 44, China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College*, January 2025.

CMSI Notes

8. Erickson, Andrew S. and Christopher H. Sharman "Admiral Miao Hua's Fall: Further Navy Fallout?." *CMSI Note 11, China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College*, November 2024.
9. Erickson, Andrew S. and Christopher H. Sharman "PLAN Chief of Staff VADM Li Hanjun: Fast-Rising Star of Training and Education Extinguished." *CMSI Note 15, China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College*, July 2025.
10. Erickson, Andrew S. and Christopher H. Sharman "Replacement Removed: VADM/General Wang Houbin — Naval Star Turned Rocket Force Commander's Terminal Trajectory." *CMSI Note 17, China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College*, November 2025.
11. Erickson, Andrew S., Jordan Shaw, and Christopher H. Sharman "Flying Higher and Higher: VADM Cui Yuzhong — Moving Up in Complex Times." *CMSI Note 20, China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College*, February 2026.

CMSI Quarterly Review — Director's Notes

12. Sharman, Christopher H. "From the Director." *CMSI Quarterly Review, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Maritime Geopolitics of the Belt and Road Initiative), China Maritime Studies Institute*, 2025.
13. Sharman, Christopher H. "From the Director." *CMSI Quarterly Review, Vol. 1, No. 2, China Maritime Studies Institute*, 2025.
14. Sharman, Christopher H. "From the Director." *CMSI Quarterly Review, Vol. 1, No. 3, China Maritime Studies Institute*, 2025.
15. Sharman, Christopher H. "From the Director." *CMSI Quarterly Review, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Spring), China Maritime Studies Institute*, 2026.

Policy & Commentary

16. Sharman, Christopher H. "Warship Visits to Taiwan Will Show China That the U.S. Means Business." *Washington Times*, December 10, 2019.
17. Sharman, Christopher H. and Derek Grossman "How to Read Vietnam's Latest Defense White Paper: A Message to Great Powers." *War on the Rocks*, December 31, 2019.
18. Sharman, Christopher H. "After a China-Vietnam Standoff, Expect a Turn to the U.S.." *The Diplomat*, September 2019.
19. Sharman, Christopher H. "Washington's Defense Burden-Sharing Demands Must Continue." *Washington Times*, February 19, 2020.
20. Sharman, Christopher H. "Even Coronavirus Couldn't Stop the 2nd U.S. Carrier Visit to Vietnam." *The Diplomat*, March 2020.
21. Sharman, Christopher H. "China is Winning its Campaign to Control the South China Sea." *RealClearPolitics*, May 11, 2020.
22. Sharman, Christopher H. "America — Keep Your Eye on the Ball." *RealClearDefense*, March 31, 2020.

Thesis

23. Sharman, Christopher H. "Japan's Nuclear Weapons Options and U.S. Security Interests." *M.A. Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School*, 1999.

MEDIA APPEARANCES & INTERVIEWS

Television & Video Interviews

- "China's Maritime Force and Tensions Around Taiwan" — Al Jazeera Balkans, on-camera interview (November 14, 2024)

Print & Online Media (Quoted) — English Language

- The Wall Street Journal — "China Creates New Aviation Mystery With Offshore Warning Zones" (April 2026)
- The Japan Times — "Chinese Navy's Goal of Projecting Power Around Globe Gains Steam" (January 15, 2026)
- The New York Times — "China's Aircraft Carriers Push Into Waters Long Dominated by U.S." (July 17, 2025)
- The Cipher Brief — "Understanding China's Growing Nuclear Arsenal" (June 13, 2025)
- Business Insider — "China's Catastrophic South China Sea Crash Shows How Dangerous High-Risk Moves at Sea Can Be" (August 16, 2025)
- The Economist — "Fresh Doubts About China's Ability to Invade Taiwan" (December 5, 2024)
- CommonWealth Magazine (Taiwan) — "China's Largest Military Exercise Near Taiwan in 28 Years: What's Different?" (December 16, 2024)
- CNN — "Two Key Military Appointments from China's Naval Ranks Reflects Xi's Territorial Ambitions" (January 3, 2024)
- Financial Times — "Chinese Research Ships Dramatically Increase Incursions Near Taiwan" (February 26, 2024)

Print & Online Media (Quoted) — German Language

- Handelsblatt — "Drei Szenarien: Wie wird China auf die Wahl in Taiwan reagieren?" (January 12, 2024)
- Handelsblatt — "Kampffjets und Mango-Bann – China sendet Drohbotschaft an Taiwan" (August 25, 2023)

Print & Online Media (Quoted) — Chinese Language

- BBC Chinese — "越南南沙建島低調超車中國" (Vietnam Quietly Surpasses China in Spratly Island Building) (August 28, 2025)
- BBC Chinese — "中國雙航母『遼寧』號及『山東』號穿越太平洋『第二島鏈』意味著什麼?" (What Does China's Dual Carrier Crossing of the Second Island Chain Mean?) (June 25, 2025)
- BBC Chinese — "劍指第三島鏈? 中國軍艦為何無預警在澳洲外海實彈演習" (Targeting the Third Island Chain? Chinese Live-Fire Exercises Off Australia) (March 7, 2025)
- BBC Chinese — "從錢凱港到兩洋鐵路: 一文讀懂中國如何在美國拉美後院擴張" (From Chancay to the Transoceanic Railway) (December 5, 2024)

Lectures & Presentations

- "China's Naval Expansion" — Issues in National Security Lecture Series, U.S. Naval War College, February 11, 2025 (40,000+ views on YouTube)

Selected Speaking Engagements

- Combined Naval Event — Navy Leaders — Farnborough, UK (May 19–21, 2026)
- UCLA Global Development Lab — Career and U.S.-China Relations Briefing — University of California, Los Angeles (April 21, 2026)
- Harvard University Veterans Organization (HUVO) Fireside Chat Series — Harvard University (March 30, 2026)
- Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force Command and Staff College — China Maritime Security Lecture (February 18, 2025)
- Naval War College Foundation All Members' Meeting — CMSI Update Presentation, Newport, RI (June 10, 2024; available on YouTube)
- CMSI Conference — "The People of China's Navy and Other Maritime Forces" — U.S. Naval War College (May 14–15, 2025)

Podcasts & Radio

- "China Center Director Series — China Maritime Studies Institute" (with Andrew S. Erickson) — CLSC Dialogues Podcast, U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute (May 30, 2024)
- "Vietnam's Balancing Act" — Area 45 Podcast, Hoover Institution (2019–2020)
- The John Batchelor Show (nationally syndicated) — Approximately 8 appearances on China maritime and Indo-Pacific security topics (2019–2020)

EDUCATION

M.S., National Strategic Studies 2015
National War College, National Defense University | Distinguished Graduate

National Security Affairs Fellow 2019 – 2020
Stanford University's Hoover Institution

M.A., National Security Affairs 1999
Naval Postgraduate School

Diploma, Command and General Staff College 2006
U.S. Army | Formally Designated as U.S. Navy Strategist

B.A., Political Science 1993
University of California, San Diego

Language Training — Defense Language Institute

- Japanese (2000)
- Mandarin Chinese (2008)
- Vietnamese (2016)

HONORS & AWARDS

Government & Intelligence Community

- ODNI Exceptional Service Medal — Office of the Director of National Intelligence (2023)
- DoD Attaché of the Year — U.S. Department of Defense (2010–2011)
- Herman Dworkin Award for Maritime Analytic Excellence — Naval Intelligence Community (2013)
- Admiral Edwin T. Layton Award for Superior Leadership and Mentorship

Academic & Literary

- Alfred Thayer Mahan Award for Literary Achievement — U.S. Navy League (2016 & 2021) — Two-time recipient
- Distinguished Graduate — National War College
- President's Award for Excellence in Writing — National Defense University (2015)

Military Decorations

- Defense Superior Service Medal
- Defense Meritorious Service Medal (x4)
- Meritorious Service Medal (x2)
- Joint Service Commendation Medal (x2)
- Joint Service Achievement Medal (x2)
- Navy Achievement Medal (x2)
- Numerous campaign and service medals and ribbons

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

- China's naval modernization and global maritime ambitions
- Taiwan Strait scenarios and cross-strait military dynamics
- South China Sea and East China Sea security
- Indo-Pacific regional security and alliance structures
- People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) personnel, training, and leadership
- U.S.-Vietnam defense relations
- Geopolitical risk analysis for executive and board audiences
- Open-source Chinese-language research and analysis
- Intelligence community strategy and interagency coordination