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During the third and final presidential debate, President Barack Obama's remark that the size of the U.S. naval fleet is "not a game of Battleship, where we're counting ships," revealed an uncomfortable truth.

When it comes to the U.S. Navy, the president, as commander in chief, is severely out of touch with the mission demands, capabilities and day-to-day requirements of a naval fleet that is undersized and becoming increasingly more imbalanced.

Ironically, the president's poorly delivered statement on the Navy and its overall state of readiness comes on the heels of the military's strategic shift to the Pacific — a strategy the president himself ordered. With this shift, the Navy will be the tip of the spear, establishing a presence in the Asia-Pacific region while still executing missions elsewhere in the world.

Why then disparage the Navy, in a presidential debate of all places?

The only plausible explanation is that the president's world view doesn't match reality.

The attack against the U.S. consulate in Libya is just the latest example of this fact.

Former Gov. Mitt Romney's point that the Navy is shrinking to the detriment of national security was exactly right. Today's Navy numbers 287 ships and as Romney rightly acknowledged, "We're heading down to the low 200s."

The Navy's own 30-year shipbuilding plan calls for at least 313 ships. The latest Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel report calls for 346 vessels. Even more recently, in testimony this year before Congress, the Navy for the first time on record asserted that to meet

full day-to-day requirements, a fleet exceeding 500 ships is needed.

Each of these estimates is significantly larger than the Navy's current inventory of ships. Even where production is occurring, in the case of the littoral combat ship in particular, naval capability is disproportionately growing in some areas while backsliding in others. The target to acquire 55 LCS, for instance, means that the Marine Corps will continue operating with 10 fewer amphibious vessels — something it needs for its basic mission function.

It's true that ships today are far more capable than they were just decades ago, but these same ships are undertaking expanded roles and running at a much higher-mission tempo. With approximately one-third of the fleet in a constant state of maintenance, doing more with less, without adding numbers, is a recipe for accelerating wear and tear and forcing ships into non-deployable condition.

What makes this all so disconcerting is the perception that we live in a vacuum.

In actuality, China is making significant naval advancements of its own while building influence and provoking tension with Taiwan. Russia is reinvesting in its defense infrastructure, including naval assets, and Iran, posing a direct threat to the U.S. and Israel, is threatening the Strait of Hormuz.

History shows us the importance of a navy to any nation that has ever commanded the seas by projecting military force and navigating trade routes. Any nation at its peak is connected to its patrol of the oceans and as navies fall, so do economies, and vice versa.

America is stronger because of our Navy and our ability to reach out and touch others by protecting the oceans and coastlines, and delivering humanitarian aid.

The size and strength of the Navy are far too important to trivialize. Any president who ignores the necessity of an effective Navy must look inward and recognize what it means to be commander in chief.