



The Telegram

Vol. 6

A Publication of the FPRI-Temple University Consortium on Grand Strategy

October 2011

HISTORY AND STRATEGIES: GRAND, MARITIME, AND AMERICAN

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The Telegram is a publication of the Hertog Program in Grand Strategy, jointly sponsored by Temple University's Center for the Study of Force and Diplomacy and the Foreign Policy Research Institute, and made possible by a grant from the Hertog Foundation.

*Of sea-captains young or old, and the mates, and of all intrepid sailors,
Of the few, very choice, taciturn, whom fate can never surprise nor death dismay.
Pick'd sparingly without noise by thee old ocean, chosen by thee,
Thou sea that pickest and cullest the race in time, and unitest nations,
Suckled by thee, old husky nurse, embodying thee,
Indomitable, untamed as thee.*

--Walt Whitman, "A Song for all Seas, all Ships"

A classic treatise on grand strategy specifically addressed the geopolitics of the Pacific Rim in the aftermath of the First World War. Its cautionary conclusion warned that great powers drawn to compete for commerce and empire in the vast vacuum of the North Pacific invariably over-reached. Bids for hegemony by Spain and Portugal, then Britain and Russia, had already been thwarted and the likelihood in the 20th century was that Japan would be tempted to overreach followed, perhaps, by the United States. The author of that prescient analysis was none other than Karl Haushofer, whose reputation is that of a leading proponent of *continental* geopolitics fixated on the quest for hegemony over the Heartland of Eurasia, which his English counterpart Halford Mackinder dubbed the World Island.

Haushofer's first career as an artillery officer climaxed in 1908-10 when he served as an attaché in Japan and even met the Meiji emperor. The seven-sided scramble for imperial concessions in the Far East transfixed him, even after he left active duty, earned a doctorate, and began a second career focused on Germany's geopolitics. Haushofer's very first book, in fact, was an analysis of the geography driving Japanese expansion and his second book was the grand geopolitics of the Pacific. Moreover, he never imagined in his land-power studies to follow that a single empire could impose a hegemony on the World Island. Rather, he suggested Germany seek an alliance with Russia to control the heartland and alliances with Italy and Japan to secure its *maritime flanks*.¹

1. Karl Haushofer, *Das Japanische Reich in seiner geographischen Entwicklung* (Vienna: L.W. Seidel, 1921) and *Geopolitik des pazifischen Ozeans* (Berlin-Grunewald: Kurt Vowinckel, 1924). His literal warning was that all nations who overreached in the Pacific were sure to experience "fühlbare, sichtbare Strafe" – tangible, visible punishment, like a whipping (p. 234). Haushofer returned to the study of maritime power with a vengeance in *Weltmeere und Weltmächte* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte Verlag, 1937). I

Haushofer's closet navalism proves how ubiquitous was the sway of the American Naval War College Professor A. T. Mahan. His *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* "went viral" after 1890 and helped to persuade the leaders of almost all the great powers to join the global race for blue water navies, global markets, and colonies. But the very fact that the Mahanian thesis about the decisiveness of sea-power stoked a nearly universal navalism really testifies to the *folly and pride* of the leaders in those Great Powers that lacked the endowments Mahan identified as the bases of sea power. They included: "I. Geographical Position. II. Physical Conformation, including, as connected therewith, natural productions and climate. III. Extent of Territory. IV. Number of Population. V. Character of the People. VI. Character of the Government, including therein the national institutions."² To the extent that a nation scored high in those categories (and Mahan's America certainly did) it might confidently venture forth on the high seas. Yet a nation, no matter how large, populous, rich, or industrial, that lacked one or more of these features—for instance, access to open seas from defensible ports—must content itself with a maritime strategy limited to coastal defense. That pride-wounding caveat was lost on Russia, Italy, and Germany, among others.

In retrospect, it has been argued that Mahan's theories were oversimplified and accepted all too uncritically. His analysis of 18th century British economics and strategy was essentially correct, but analogizing them to late 19th century America was not. His fixation on command of the seas through decisive fleet engagements ignored many other important maritime roles. In retrospect, the best theorist of the era (and one even the Naval War College would teach in the 1920s) was Sir Julian Corbett, precisely because he stressed maritime, not just naval power, by de-emphasizing big battleship determinism and stressing the roles of blockades, amphibious operations, logistics, and army-navy combined arms.³ Navies have always been about "jointness" as we call it today, which is why, as Hugh Strachan observed, an almost unconscious distinction is drawn between strategy and naval or maritime strategy. The former is usually restricted to land warfare in the manner of Clausewitz and leans down toward operations, while the latter embraces land, air, and sea and thus stretches up toward grand strategy.⁴

The era of nearly universal naval and colonial competition spelled crisis for the world's long-standing naval, colonial, financial, and commercial leader. Throughout the many decades when Britannia ruled the waves, her Admiralty boasted of a Two-Power Standard (the Royal Navy should exceed the next two largest navies combined) and her Foreign Office boasted of Splendid Isolation. But the rise of many competitors rendered those luxuries unsustainable. Especially vexing were the Franco-Russian Alliance (1894), Germany's High Sea Fleet program (1897), the appearance of America's Two-Ocean, Blue-Ocean Navy (1898) and Russian and Japanese fleets in Northeast Asia (1901). No longer able to enjoy command of the seas everywhere at once, the British hedged against potential rivals by concluding an alliance with Japan (1902) and ententes with the U.S. (1901), France (1904), and Russia (1907). In retrospect, Britain's maritime hegemony was bound to end sooner or later as other nations industrialized (just as America's post-World War II hegemony had to erode over time). When at last "normal" competitive times returned and several peer competitors arose in various global theaters, the British sought partners to help police the seas (just as the U.S. Navy seeks partners today).

Yet Wilhelmine Germany stubbornly raced, even after H.M.S. *Dreadnought* raised the stakes after 1906. Admiral Tirpitz assured the Kaiser that the German fleet did not need to equal, much less defeat, Britain's North Sea fleet, because once it reached a critical mass the British would gladly make imperial concessions rather than risk all in a war. That "I dare you" strategy of extortion inspired a classic exchange of memoranda in the Foreign Office which diplomatic histories invariably cite (most recently Henry Kissinger's *On China*) to illustrate the conundrums posed when a suddenly rising power challenges an established one.

On New Year's Day 1907 Eyre Crowe, a brilliant newcomer to the Foreign Office, penned the following minute on a Foreign Office document reviewing European affairs.⁵

Second only to the ideal of independence, nations have always cherished the right of free intercourse and

discovered these earlier maritime works by Haushofer while researching Walter A. McDougall, *Let the Sea Make a Noise... A History of the North Pacific From Magellan to MacArthur* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

2. A. T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1957 <1980>), p. 25.

3. Clark G. Reynolds, *Command of the Sea: The History and Strategy of Maritime Empires* (New York: William Morrow, 1974), pp. 402-15; Philip A. Crowl, "Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Naval Historian," in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton University, 1976), pp. 444-77. In addition to *Influence* see Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power: Present and Future* (Boston: Little, Brown 1897) and *The Problem of Asia and its Effect on International Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1900). Julian Corbett's masterpiece was *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (London: Longman's, Green, 1911).

4. Hugh Strachan, "The Lost Meaning of Strategy," *Survival* (Autumn 2005), p. 37, cited by Timothy D. Hoyt, "The United States and Maritime Strategy: A Parochial View from the U.S. Naval War College," *Orbis* 51:4 (2007): 577-84.

5. From the *British Documents on the Origins of the War*. For a complete on-line text see

http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Memorandum_on_the_Present_State_of_British_Relations_with_France_and_Germany

trade, in the world's markets, and in proportion as England champions the principle of the largest measure of general freedom of commerce, she undoubtedly strengthens her hold on the interested friendship of other nations, at least to the extent of making them feel less apprehensive of naval supremacy in the hands of a free trade England than they would in the face of a predominant protectionist Power. This is an aspect of the free trade question which is apt to be overlooked. *It has been well said that every country, if it had the option, would, of course, prefer itself to hold the power of supremacy at sea, but that, this choice being excluded, it would rather see England hold that power than any other State* (italics added).

That passage is justly famous and felicitous, at least to Anglo-Americans. We believe in a liberal, open world order, hence other nations can trust us to exercise a benevolent hegemony. But to stop there and conclude that Crowe was a hawk vis-à-vis Germany ignores the dilemma posed by a rising new power's intentions. Indeed, Crowe continued with an either/or:

Either Germany is definitely aiming at a general political hegemony and maritime ascendancy, threatening the independence of her neighbours and ultimately the existence of England; Or Germany, free from any such clear-cut ambition, and thinking for the present merely of using her legitimate position and influence as one of the leading Powers in the council of nations, is seeking to promote her foreign commerce, spread the benefits of German culture, extend the scope of her national energies, and create fresh German interests all over the world wherever and whenever a peaceful opportunity offers, leaving it to an uncertain future to decide whether the occurrence of great changes in the world may not some day assign to Germany a larger share of direct political action over regions not now a part of her dominions, without that violation of the established rights of other countries which would be involved in any such action under existing political conditions. *In either case Germany would clearly be wise to build as powerful a navy as she can afford* (italics added).

Thus, Germany's naval program might be a weapon designed to overthrow the world order or a tool to help her forge a larger (responsible) stake in that order. But Sir Thomas Sanderson, a brilliant veteran just retired from Whitehall, responded to Crowe with a sigh. He bade him (and by extension his chief, Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Gray) to see world politics from Germany's point of view:

It has sometimes seemed to me that to a foreigner reading our press the British Empire must appear in the light of some huge giant sprawling over the globe, with gouty fingers and toes stretching in every direction, which cannot be approached without eliciting a scream.

In short, Sanderson argued that Britain's empire and its maritime lifelines could be secured better through accommodation of a rising peer competitor than by arrogant outrage and dogged defense of the status quo. The parallels to the United States and China today are obvious. But in retrospect what ought to surprise historians about the Crowe-Sanderson exchange is that both took German naval ambition for granted. That is, neither one concluded that since Germany was functionally land-locked it was either foolish or malign for the Kaiser to challenge Britain's maritime supremacy. Indeed, the Kaiser's High Seas Fleet really weakened Germany by turning Britain and all her new friends into enemies and thus imperiling even Germany's supremacy on land. One can only surmise that Crowe and Sanderson, being British, took for granted the delicious appeal of sea power and were not surprised Germans wanted some, too. But you can't argue with geography. The Germans could not get away with pursuing world power in the same manner as the British, just as the Japanese could not get away with claiming a "Monroe Doctrine" in the same way as the Americans. That was because geography allowed the U.S. to arrogate to itself the Caribbean without stepping on any gouty fingers and toes, whereas geography ensured that any similar claims by Japan in the northwest Pacific were bound to elicit screams from Russia, China, Britain, or the United States.

One need not be a geographical determinist to conclude from the historical narrative of the modern era, at least, that every bid for hegemony by a terrestrial empire was doomed. From the Holy Roman Empire of Ferdinand II and to the France of Louis XIV and Napoleon to the Germany of the Kaiser and Hitler to the Russia of the tsars and commissars, all such bids were defeated by rival coalitions orchestrated and supported by one or more maritime powers. Indeed, the Duke of Wellington himself confessed, "If anyone wishes to know the history of this <Napoleonic> war, I will tell them it is our maritime superiority <which> gives me the power of maintaining my army while the enemy are unable to do so."⁶

By contrast, those nations that pursued the most successful grand strategies, that garnered global power and pelf, and *pari passu* advanced human rights, international law, commerce, science, and culture, have been self-contained, self-governing, mostly Protestant federations including the Netherlands' *United Provinces*, which served as a model for the British Isles' *United Kingdom*, whose union of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland for the pursuit of power abroad served as a model for the 13 American colonies' *United States*. Indeed, the integral story of modern history is not so much the struggle between

6. Wellington cited by Clark G. Reynolds, *Command of the Sea: The History and Strategy of Maritime Empires* (New York: William Morrow, 1974), p. 276.

hegemony and balance of power, or between land power and sea power, but between the reigning maritime supremacy and its successor. Mahan's history made that explicit for the 17th century by pushing the wars of religion and Bourbon France into the background while concentrating on the Anglo-Dutch wars for control of the seas. A similar focus on the 20th century might stress America's swift supplanting of British power for which the hot and cold wars against the dictatorships were the occasions.

Equally instructive is a study of the Great Powers that tried and failed to compete on the high seas. Russia has built many fleets from Peter the Great to Admiral Gorshkov, and every one ended up rotting, rusting, or sunk in battle. A nearly land-locked or choke-point constrained empire, no matter how big and rich, just cannot aspire to a first-rank blue water navy. France, by contrast, was bigger and richer and almost as oceanic as Britain throughout modern history, yet the French repeatedly squandered their assets by trying to be dominant on land and on sea simultaneously. They invariably lost out in both theaters. Imperial Germany was as bottled up as Russia since the British could plug the North Sea, yet the Kaiser bought Admiral Tirpitz's theory that once a German High Seas Fleet reached a critical mass, the British would not risk a war and instead would grant Germany global concessions. That strategy of threat and extortion only ensured the encirclement of Germany by a hostile alliance. But sea powers can also make mortal blunders. Japan enjoyed regional naval supremacy, indeed a sort of Japanese Monroe Doctrine, from 1904 to 1937. But rather than seeing insular Japan as the Asian mirror of Britain and privileging naval power, the Mikado saw Japan as the Asian mirror of Germany and privileged the Army. Hence, Japan exhausted itself in a suicidal bid for a mainland empire. One might even say the British, too, lost their maritime supremacy by engaging in two exhausting world wars on land. One might even wonder whether the United States is in danger of squandering its supremacy through a series of discretionary land wars in Asia.

The purpose of this long preface is to sketch in the elaborate backdrop to our contemporary tensions over the rise of Chinese offshore military ambitions and so render more plausible short assertions regarding some of the questions addressed in this CNA conference. First, all truly grand and successful strategies have been essentially (if not exclusively) maritime. Second, no nation's rise to world power has been more swift and complete than that of the United States. Third, therefore, America's rise must have reflected one or more maritime strategies, hence the United States must ipso facto be able to do grand strategy. Of course, we can introduce lots of complications regarding definitions, parameters, and operational features of grand strategy, not to mention how consistent, codified, or even how conscious a grand strategy must be. For a lengthy discussion of the question "Can America Do Grand Strategy?" see my essay published in *Orbis* (Spring 2010).

Americans' bias toward maritime strategy is in fact over-determined. The geographical location, expanse, topography, and resources of North America make it the *real* World Island and thus by far the best suited to nurture a maritime supremacy. Indeed, the United States ranks first or close to it in all six of Mahan's fundamentals for sea power. But the fact that the United States is history's largest and most successful thalassocracy (Greek for "rule by the sea") is attributable to cultural traits inherited from Great Britain as well as innate material and spatial endowments. Thus did the classic naval historian Clark Reynolds define the *purpose* of thalassocracy as "control of the sea lanes and islands by one state to insure its economic prosperity and thus its political integrity." But the manner of control, commerce, and polity most conducive to maritime supremacy just happens to foster more independent (he calls it "national privacy"), liberal, entrepreneurial, individualistic, representative, curious, diverse, cosmopolitan, and creative people and institutions than do rigidly hierarchical extractive land empires. ("Isn't it funny," he cites John Marin, "that Dictators *never never never* live by the sea?") Moreover, navies cannot occupy or plunder provinces in the manner of armies and so pose little threat to civil liberties. Navies are expensive and take a long time to build, but can quickly decay or be lost, hence they tend to be conservative. Yet they venture forth on a chessboard claiming 71 percent of the earth's surface and serving as highways to all civilizations of mankind, hence navies tend to be cosmopolitan. Thus, whereas armies and their historians tend toward a narrow, national perspective, naval historians tend to be universal in their perspective, stressing and generally (if guardedly) optimistic about the progress that seafaring peoples have bestowed upon civilization.⁷

America's true policy, as George Washington and Alexander Hamilton phrased it, was to preserve the incomparable blessing of her insulation from Europe's broils through a foreign policy of neutrality and a naval strategy of coastal and commercial

7. Reynolds, *Command of the Sea*, esp. pp. 1-16, and *History and the Sea: Essays on Maritime Strategies* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1989); "thalassocracy" and "control of the sea lanes," p. 20; "national privacy," p. 6; "Isn't it funny," p. 21. Reynolds knows he is bucking the conventional wisdom about "the American way of war" and its emphasis on mass, materiel, and attrition dating back at least to U.S. Grant. But he insists the big land wars have been the exceptions, not the rule, in American history. Stressing national history and land warfare, scholars like Russell F. Weigley falsely concluded that "the history of usable combat may be at least reaching its end" in the nuclear era, whereas it only made the world safe for more limited war. He believed American strategic history also suffered from a serious and closely related shortcoming until quite recently, namely the subordination of naval doctrinal history to Army's (and Air Force's). Not until 1956 did any survey of American military doctrines offer a balanced treatment of the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps. That was Walter Millis, *Arms and Men: A Study in American Military History* (New York: Putnam, 1956), although Harold and Margaret Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power, 1776-1918* (Princeton, 1939) was "something of a turning buoy to a new course."

defense. So long as Americans did not throw away their geographical advantages, then their natural growth born of liberty and prosperity would surely make them in time a continental empire greater than any in history. But the original U.S. strategy was also maritime for reasons of political culture. Consider Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution. It grants to Congress the power “To raise and support Armies, but no Appropriation of Money to that Use shall be for a longer Term than two Years,” and the power “To provide and maintain a Navy”—period, no restrictions. That very conscious distinction derived from the knowledge that a standing army posed a potential threat to the liberties of people at home whereas a navy was by definition offshore and a threat only to foreigners. Hence the John Adams administration and Congress created a cabinet-rank Department of the Navy (1798), whereas Washington had founded a Department of War rather than Army on the assumption that there would be no sizeable army except during war! That dispensation reflected the experience of the English Civil War during which both Crown and Parliament fielded armies to wrest political power from each other. So it was, in the wake of that conflict, that King Charles II christened Britain’s maritime forces the Royal Navy with the blessing of Parliament, whereas no monarch dared speak of a Royal Army, because it is understood that the British army belong to Parliament.⁸

Those distinctions are now lost on us, first because American armies never have threatened civil supremacy, and second because the Cold War arms race obliged the United States to go on a war-footing even in peacetime. But in our early national era it was understood that all the United States needed for a long term grand strategy was a respected naval force plus militias, because its strategy was maritime.⁹

The first grand strategy was the Federalist vision promoted by Hamilton through the Constitution, Federalist Paper #11, Washington’s Farewell Address which he mostly drafted, and the naval construction program that produced our nation’s first fleet of sturdy frigates.¹⁰ President John Adams employed them to good account in the Quasi-War against the French Republic and Jefferson against the Barbary corsairs. Indeed, what made this grand strategy permanent was the fact that it outlasted the Federalist era and won over Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Andrew Jackson, who against all expectation proved to be a naval enthusiast. The four great traditions of 19th century U.S. diplomacy which I described in my book *Promised Land, Crusader State*, all depended upon and in turn supported the maritime strategy of “separate spheres” between the Old World and New first expressed in Tom Paine’s *Common Sense* and made explicit in the Monroe Doctrine drafted by John Quincy Adams. Those principles included Exceptionalism, which meant civil and religious Liberty, Independence, and Unity at home so as to unleash the creative powers of the people to grow the nation; next, Unilateralism or Neutralism which was anything but Isolationism, because Washington’s maritime strategy insisted that the United States would seek friendship and commerce with all nations while shunning alliances except in emergencies; next, the American System of post-colonial republics envisioned in the Monroe Doctrine; and finally the fruit of it all: Expansionism or Manifest Destiny that no power on earth could prevent (at least after the Louisiana Purchase held up) except the American people themselves. Hence the greatest crisis of our first grand strategy was the Civil War in which the Union was saved and Europe narrowly kept from intervening, by General Scott’s Anaconda Plan, a maritime strategy for victory based on coastal and riverine blockades to strangle the Confederacy.

The second American maritime strategy, which was initially devised to reinforce the nation’s original grand strategy under new circumstances, flourished from roughly 1880 to the aftermath of the Great War around 1920. It was anchored, literally and figuratively, on the vision of a two-ocean, blue water, steel, coal- and then oil-fired navy whose missions were to enforce the Monroe Doctrine and shelter America’s growing foreign trade during the dangerous heyday of industrialism, the so-called New Imperialism, naval arms races. This grand strategy was, needless to say, explicitly and overwhelmingly maritime as it was conceived and promoted by Secretary of Navy Benjamin Tracy, Naval War College founder Stephen B. Luce, Navy Captain and author A. T. Mahan, and Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt. The Republican Party midwived the new strategy, but Progressives in both parties nurtured it, not least Woodrow Wilson, who pledged to build a United States Navy “second to none.” The Great White Fleet, Panama Canal, overseas naval bases and colonies, and first big military-industrial complex were themselves only the naval expression of a self-conscious grand strategy for the United States that included promotion of exports, assimilation of immigrants, regulation of interstate and overseas commerce, national

8. England’s sea power dates from Henry VIII who informally referred to his personally financed warships as the Navy Royal. Charles II flipped the words, made them official, and applied them to all government-owned and -scripted ships. For a survey of war powers in American history see Walter A. McDougall, “The Constitutional History of U.S. Foreign Policy: 222 Years in the Twilight Zone” at: <http://www.fpri.org/pubs/2010/McDougall.ConstitutionalHistoryUSForeignPolicy.pdf>

9. The following descriptions of U.S. grand/maritime strategies owes much to the lectures of Karl F. Walling. See his article, “A Backward Look at Some Forward-Thinking Maritime Strategists,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 50: 3 (2008): 130-39.

10. Although I don’t believe I used the term grand strategy, the fact that the mutually supportive, internally consistent American foreign policy traditions bequeathed by the great statesmen of the early republic amounted to a grand strategy is self-evident in Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter With the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997). I certainly describe them as such in a lecture and essay produced last year for the Temple University/Foreign Policy Research Institute Consortium on Grand Strategy. See Walter A. McDougall, “Can America Do Grand Strategy” *Orbis* 54: 2 (2010): 165-84.

standards, public education, and big government mediation between big business and labor. These were the Progressive Era's responses to the novel challenges of globalization, industrialization, urbanization, imperialism, and navalism.¹¹

The third American grand strategy emerged during World War II and mutated into its final form during the early Cold War. It was a strategy aimed at global—truly global—power projection but not, repeat not, territorial occupations in Europe or Asia. It was conceived by that “former naval person” Franklin Roosevelt and his Congressional paladin Carl Vinson. FDR imagined a postwar United Nations keeping the peace, but really run by his Four Policemen each with its own “beat” or implicit sphere of influence. He also imagined a truly global and open economic system bankrolled and managed by the United States. America's modes of enforcement in this New World Order were to be sea, air, and financial power, which is why Roosevelt spoke at Yalta of pulling American troops home from Europe within eighteen months of a German surrender. Instead, the Truman administration sharply reinforced U.S. ground forces in Europe and Asia in response to the Berlin Blockade and Korean War. But President Eisenhower devised a Cold War Containment strategy “for the long haul” by stressing nuclear deterrence plus air and naval supremacy. And, just as FDR had envisioned, that maritime supremacy based on sea and air power also patrolled the global commons in the interest of an open and prosperous economy.

The fourth American maritime strategy (but still within the grand strategy of Containment) was the 1980s response to the rapid Soviet naval buildup dramatized in the early Tom Clancy novels. But it really ought to be dated to 1969 when the Nixon Administration began the long withdrawal of American ground forces from South Vietnam. In a speech at the very apt location of the island of Guam (following the splashdown of the Apollo 11 astronauts), the president proclaimed the Nixon Doctrine to the effect that henceforth the United States would assist peoples threatened by aggression with all manner of military and economic support except ground combat units. “Asian boys must fight Asian wars,” he said. The doctrine was made explicit and operational in the post-Vietnam era by the ancillary doctrine promulgated by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and elaborated by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell, which specified stringent conditions under which U.S. ground forces should or should not be deployed in combat. Taken together these doctrines signaled a very strong bias toward an offshore balancing strategy that came to define America's posture during the third and last stage of the Cold War. Its most perfect expression was the New Maritime Strategy launched in 1981 by Ronald Reagan's Navy Secretary John Lehman. In it, America found her way partially back to Washington's “true policy” or at least what Washington's rule implied in an era of global Cold War and nuclear deterrence. The U.S. Navy was tasked with defending the whole world's sea lanes and choke points against any Red Navy breakout, securing the U.S. Navy's submarine-based portion of the nuclear triad, and guaranteeing logistical and fire support for the Air/Land Battle operations plan in case of a NATO/Warsaw Pact war in Europe. All that added up to the ambitious goal of a 600 ship Navy. It was never achieved due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, but the New Maritime Strategy survived as a template for post-Cold War planning.¹²

The first efforts at such, including the 1992 plan “From the Sea.....” and 1994 plan “Forward... From the Sea” were tentative and sterile due to the defense budget cuts and general complacency following the 1991 Gulf War. Thus, American strategy was most adrift during the very years when the United States enjoyed maximal freedom of action.¹³ The Global War on Terror after 2001 brought a host of new distractions born of protracted counter-insurgency warfare that violated American grand strategic doctrine and conjured more budgetary woes born, this time, of profligacy rather than penury. By mid-decade visionary officers, most prominently Admiral Mike Mullen, seized the initiative to educate the Pentagon, politicians, pundits, and public about the new or magnified maritime challenges in the 21st century and measures to meet them. At the International Sea Forum in December 2006 Admiral Mullen floated the bold idea of a Thousand Ship Navy to be deployed by an alliance of nations devoted to securing the global commons, not only from state aggression, but piracy, smuggling, human

11. On Progressive Imperialism see McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, chapter 5. On the rise of the new steel blue-water navy see inter alia the recent works by Henry J. Hendrix, *Theodore Roosevelt's Naval Diplomacy: The U.S. Navy and the Birth of the American Century* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 2009); Kurt Hackemer, *The U.S. Navy and the Origins of the Military-Industrial Complex, 1847-1883* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 2001); and Mark R. Shulman, *Navalism and the Emergence of American Sea Power, 1882-1893* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 1995); as well as the classics Richard D. Challener, *Admirals, Generals, and American Foreign Policy 1898-1914* (Princeton University, 1973), and Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *Makers of Naval Policy, 1798-1947* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 1980).

12. Norman Friedman, *The New Maritime Strategy* (London: Jane's, 1988).

13. I remember well the fruitless debates of those years because I was editing *Orbis* at the time and wondering, with Harvey Sicherman, how long the United States could get away with such drift. A good snapshot of the mood of those years is Norman Friedman, *Seapower as Strategy: Navies and National Interests* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 2001), because it was published just prior to the September 11 attacks. He introduced his subject with three postulate (pp. 1-4). “At the dawn of the twenty-first century the U.S. Navy is the foremost instrument of U.S. military diplomacy.” Next, “Since basing and aerial rights cannot be taken for granted <lessons of the 1990s>, Navies are the only truly sovereign military instruments.” Finally and for the ages, “About four centuries ago, Francis Bacon wrote that ‘he that commandeth the sea is at great liberty and may take as much or as little of the war as he will.’” Friedman concluded that maintaining its superior seapower was the top priority of post-Cold War America and its first line of defense because “A deployed fleet tends to keep problems at arm's length.”

trafficking, illegal immigration, terrorism, and transport of WMD.¹⁴ Then, in October 2007 the Marine Corps and Coast Guard joined the Navy in sponsoring A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower (“CS 21”) similar in some respects to 1980s plan, but focused on today’s geography, enemies, and weaponry.¹⁵ Like the Lehman conception the Cooperative Strategy must be “forward, global, allied, and joint ... must also fit the nation’s grand strategy, must be multilateral, must be effective in peacetime and limited wars, must be affordable, and must be *public*.” The latter is a subtle point. If the purpose of a strategy is to deter and keep the peace, then not surprise but publicity is mandatory.¹⁶

Finally, the rise of China, a potential peer competitor in the western Pacific, has inspired an elaborate and sophisticated operational concept called “Air-Sea Battle: A Point of Departure,” itself echoing NATO’s “Air-Land Battle” plan of the 1980s. Drafted by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, the document’s scenarios assume that China seeks the capability and may someday reveal the intention to deny the U.S. Navy access to air and sea out to the first island chain off the Chinese coast and perhaps even the second chain. The document urges the Navy and Air Force to collaborate on the planning and execution needed to ensure that U.S. and allied forces can deny China the ability to deny access to its seas (what James Kurth coded as D and D² and the document codes as A2/AD). But the authors insist repeatedly that the *purpose* of the “Air-Sea Battle Point of Departure” is not to coerce or provoke or win a war against China, but simply to deter aggressive behavior and “sustain a stable, favorable, conventional military balance throughout the Western Pacific region.”¹⁷

Can the United States devise and execute wise grand strategy in the present era of geopolitical flux and financial constraint? The answer is a highly conditional Yes ... *if* the factions within each armed service can make common cause; *if* the services as a whole can rally behind a grand strategy, *if* the Joint Chiefs can market the strategy to the Administration and Congress that will take office in 2013, and *if* the economy and public opinion can support any new strategic initiatives during an era of penury.¹⁸

From my perspective on world history and American political culture, the New Maritime Cooperative Strategy and the Air-Sea Battle operational concept meet the nation’s needs perfectly and should be especially appealing in the wake of the Iraqi and Afghan ordeals. But even a vigorous and intelligent maritime strategy cannot be assured of success. In past conflicts the United States prevailed thanks to its strategic depth, productive power, and capacity to adapt in the fog of war, not because its prewar strategy proved right. War Plan Orange never was executed. World War I at sea had no use for the Great White Fleet. Likewise, World War II turned on carriers, submarines, and strategic bombing rather than fleet actions, while the enemy targeted by the 1980s maritime strategy just imploded. All one can do today is make educated guesses about the threat matrix of the next twenty years, the future intentions of the Chinese regime or for that matter its very survival, while the complex alliance diplomacy on which the Cooperative Strategy would depend, injects an additional range of (if you’ll pardon the expression) Unknown Unknowns into the equation.¹⁹

14. The concepts of global commons, strategic restraint, and offshore balancing have been popularized and eloquently defended by Barry R. Posen. See the brief summary of them in Posen, “Stability and Change in U.S. Grand Strategy,” *Orbis* 51:4 (Fall 2007): 561-67. His cutting conclusion rightly insists that the worst way to “spread democracy” is to attempt to do by force and label it “Made in U.S.A.” In the same issue, pp. 569-75, Geoffrey Till, “Maritime Strategy in a Globalizing World,” describes the tension in recent maritime strategy between the ongoing requirements of international competition born of the modern “Westphalian state system” (in which the oceans are *res nullius* belonging to no one), and the requirements of international consensus born of postmodern Globalization (in which the oceans are a global commons belonging to all).

15. A particularly pithy yet thorough comparison of the maritime strategies of the 1980s and 2000s is James Kurth, “The New Maritime Strategy: Confronting Peer Competitors, Rogue States, and Transnational Insurgents,” *Orbis* 51: 4 (2007): 585-600.

16. Norman Friedman, *The US Maritime Strategy* (London: Jane’s Publishing, 1988), pp. 3-4.

17. The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Analysis, “Air-Sea Battle: A Point of Departure” (May 2010): <http://www.csbaonline.org/publications/2010/05/airsea-battle-concept/>
On the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) see Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China’s Navy in the Twenty-first Century* and Toski Yoshihara, *Red Star over the Pacific: China’s Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 2010).

18. Kurth, “The New Maritime Strategy,” *op.cit.*, is especially shrewd in its analysis of inter- and intra-service rivalries and preferences with regard to enemies, roles, and missions.

19. Donald Rumsfeld re-popularized the phrase in *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), but I became familiar with the concept way back in the 1980s while researching the space program. Variables and problems that will have to be overcome in a project but as yet have not even been identified are simply a vexing fact of life for scientists, engineers, and systems analysts engaged in research and development, not least the topic of my book back then: aerospace engineers. See Walter A.

Still, it is far better to think about future strategic contingencies than not to think about them. As Ike famously said, “In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable”; and “failing to plan is planning to fail.”

In conclusion I would just add that knowledge of—and respect for—the history of maritime rivalries and geopolitical realities should put us on guard against the natural impulse to over-promise or obfuscate in our efforts to “sell” strategies and weapons systems. A seemingly innocent case in point is the stated purpose of Air-Sea Battle Point of Departure, which is not roll-back or containment or a war-winning strategy or even the defense of Taiwan or other specific asset, but simply to minimize Beijing’s incentives to achieve its goals through aggression and thus “to sustain a favorable, conventional military balance throughout the Western Pacific.” As a sales pitch I like it. As a diplomatic demarche I like it. But as a grand strategic plan it begs every important question. To spend the next twenty years racing to devise countermeasures sufficient to deny the Chinese ambition to deny us access to seas out to some unspecified limit (first island chain, second island chain?) is not a formula of stability, but for the sort of perpetual competition for technical and diplomatic advantage that increases the chance of miscalculations and the incentive for preventive strikes. We must not forget the wisdom of Basil Liddell-Hart that the object of military strategy “is a better state of peace, even if only from your own point of view.”²⁰

Thus, while the Cooperative Maritime Strategy and its Air-Sea Battle corollary may prove to be of critical value in some future operational contingency, its *grand* strategic value must not be to punish or even deter bad Chinese behavior, but to encourage good Chinese behavior within *some* portion of its coastal seas which they are or soon will be certain to deny others access. What is more, to tell the Chinese in words or deeds that external powers either will not or cannot permit them to have *any* power projection beyond their coast is to reprise Opium War-style imperialism of the sort they have been patiently frantic to end! In sum, the ultimate goal of the Cooperative Strategy and Air-Sea Battle should be stand-off enforcement of a diplomatic accord under which China agrees to police the seas and protect legitimate shipping within some designated “zone of control” in return for which the Cooperative Strategy partners agree to police the seas and protect Chinese shipping beyond the zone.

I risk being keelhauled for this, I know, but my rationale in supporting the proposed maritime strategy and naval build-up is to push the status-quo powers and rising power, not toward confrontation, but toward accommodation of the sort pursued by the 1921-22 Washington Naval Conference. Of course, the three great multilateral treaties produced by that conference failed in the end to stabilize East Asia, cap naval armaments, or tame a rising Japanese Empire. But that failure was not the result of flawed ends or means. Rather, the arms control, non-aggression, and Open Door pacts were killed by China’s anarchy and xenophobia, America’s insouciance toward Japan’s needs, Japan’s vulnerability to military rule, and everyone’s collapse during the Great Depression into autarky and either militarism or isolationism. None of that history, sobering as it is, precludes the design today of a multilateral Asian/Pacific treaty regime rendered durable through realistic sanctions for violation and mutual interest in compliance.

On the contrary, a new “Washington Conference system” would be much stronger in our era precisely because no single power enjoys the regional naval hegemony that Japan did in the interwar years, and no power has an interest in sacrificing globalization for conquest. Finally, what’s the alternative to seeking a *modus vivendi* with China: straining to prolong in perpetuity the artificial post-1945 status of the Pacific Ocean as an American lake? To do that would only invite, sooner or later, the “*fühlbare, sichtbare Strafe*” (tangible, visible punishment) that Haushofer warned awaits all nations that overreach in the Pacific.

Accommodate China’s blue water aspirations? Accept a Chinese “zone of control” that U.S. and allied forces dare not contest except *in extremis*? Abandon long-standing friends in Northeast Asia to some sort of tributary status vis-a-vis Beijing? Hints that a positive answer to those questions may even be up for discussion elicit accusations of “appeasement” and invocations of Munich.²¹ The implication is that to imagine a Chinese sphere of influence out to the first island chain (and therefore inevitably half way to the second island chain) is to consign South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines (with the Spratly Islands), perhaps even Okinawa to some kind of Finlandization. But the question of just how much *American* maritime dominance is

McDougall, ...*the Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age* (New York; Basic Books, 1985), p. 439.

20. Sir Basil Liddell-Hart, *Strategy*, 2 rev. ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), p. 338.

21. For instance, June Teufel Dreyer, “Why Taiwan Matters,” Foreign Policy Research Institute E-Note (July 2011) at <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/2011/201107.dreyer.taiwan.html> summarized her testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs that critiqued such articles as Bruce Gilley, ‘Not so Dire Straits. How the Finlandization of Taiwan Benefits US Security’, *Foreign Affairs* 89:1 (2010): 44-60, and Charles Glaser, “Will China’s Rise Lead to War? Why Realism Does Not Mean Pessimism,” *Foreign Affairs* 90:2 (2011): 80-91. But see also James R. Holmes, “America’s ‘Munich Moment’?” (<http://the-diplomat.com/2011/07/17/america-s-‘munich-moment’/>) rebutted the claim by Senator James Webb (R., Va.) that the U.S. is “approaching a Munich moment with China.”

enough and therefore just where to draw a new “Dean Acheson defense perimeter” line through the seas of *China’s* oceanic “near abroad” *will* be addressed, like it or not, sooner or later. The challenge for Sino-American diplomacy is to figure out how to raise those questions voluntarily, in an atmosphere of conciliation rather than crisis, and in a regional rather than bilateral forum. Would accommodation of any sort feed the appetite of the authoritarian, nationalistic Beijing regime such that it grabs for control over more blue water in East and South China seas? The historical record strongly suggests that Chinese dynasties, even when strong, tend not to go abroad in search of monsters to destroy. But we need not trust in history, culture, or economic ties to keep the peace in the Pacific so long as the (still far superior) U.S. Navy and its friends beyond the first island chain, plus the Indian navy and its friends beyond the Straits of Malacca, are on station to keep China honest.

In short: speak softly and carry a big stick. That way the Chinese are the ones obliged to prove they can be responsible stakeholders. That way the Chinese are obliged to make the strategic choice of what kind of neighborhood they wish to inhabit.

“In political activity, then, men sail a boundless and bottomless sea: there is neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting-place nor appointed destination. The enterprise is to stay afloat on an even keel; the sea is both friend and enemy; and the seamanship consists of using the resources of a traditional manner of behaviour in order to make a friend of every hostile occasion.”

--Michael Oakeshott, *The Voice of Liberal Learning*

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