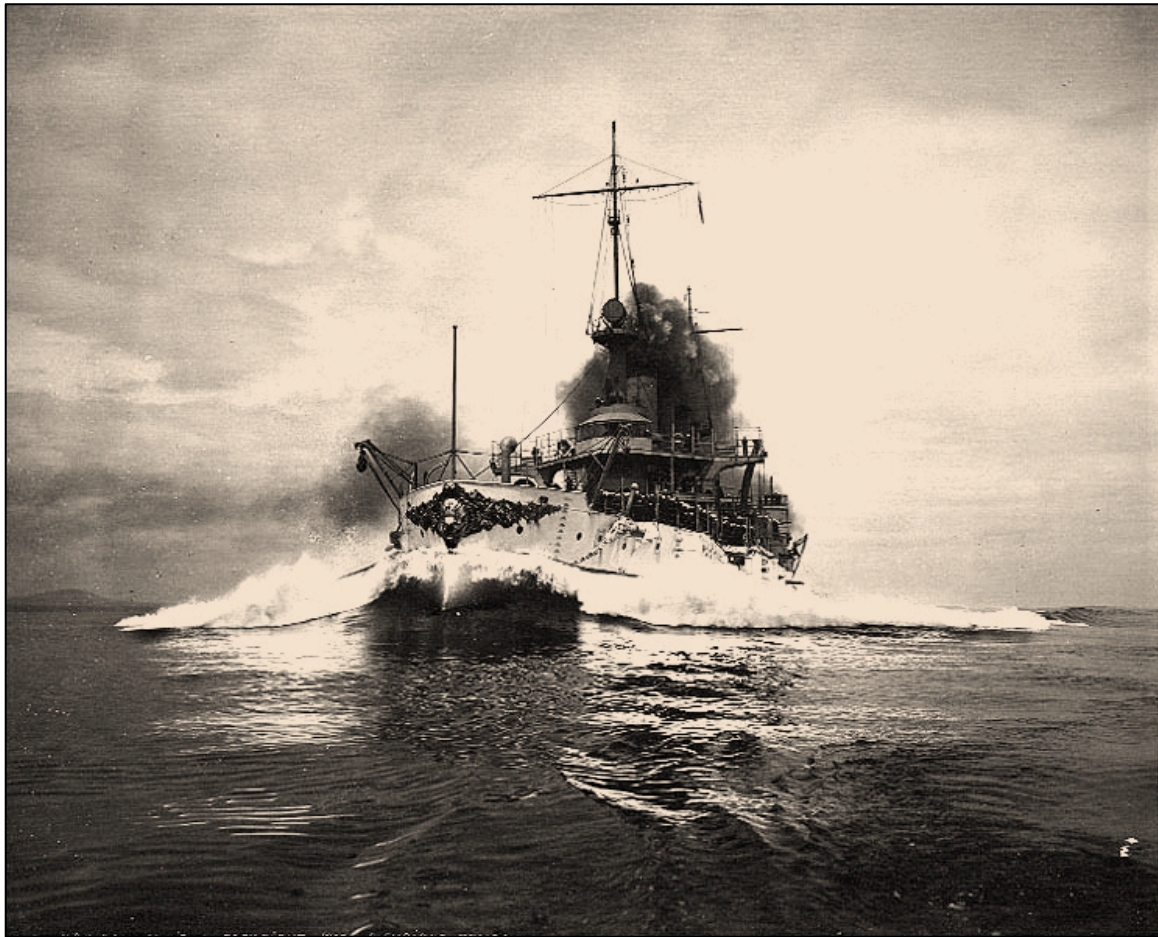


MARITIME STRATEGY FOR AN EAST-OF-SUEZ AMERICA

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From her very beginning, America has been an expansionist nation. In their pursuit of happiness as a people independent of the Old World, Americans have traditionally been builders of personal empires, great and small. But unlike the European powers, America—as a nation—did not explicitly avow an imperial mission. Therein lies a tension inherent in our democratic republic. Oft-times that tension has confused the identification and pursuit of our national interest. What then—or indeed who—has determined American interest?

In this second decade of the 21st century, a transforming America has arrived at a third stage of her history. At the same time, an entirely new geostrategic environment presents the Nation with both opportunities and threats. For the foreseeable future, however, our national leadership must meet these challenges with mounting budget

constraints. No longer is Washington able to resource the various elements of national power to maintain the global preponderance to which we have been accustomed since 1945. So, what sort of military—the costliest element—can affordably and best serve 21st century American interest in the long-term?



In the first half of the 19th century, a first-stage America pursued continental expansion, of which Manifest Destiny was a romantic expression. As well, she practiced a foreign policy that elevated the Monroe Doctrine to justify an American hemispheric sphere of influence. Toward the end of the century, partly in response to the European scramble for colonies worldwide, imperially-inclined quarters of America’s national leadership characterized the Old World as threatening the security of the hemisphere and thwarting potential U.S. commercial interests across the Pacific in China. Enunciating the Open Door policy, they more fully inserted America into the Chinese market for trade and investment. With the annexation of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War and other maritime acquisitions in the Caribbean and Pacific, this activist course signaled a challenge to European (and Japanese) imperial systems and their own spheres of influence.

Second-stage America’s turn-of-the-century national leaders henceforth embraced a new geostrategic view: Mahanian global maritime expansion. In so doing, they did choose to transform an America that had already arrived as a continental power into a maritime power as well. And a maritime power, America has remained ever since.

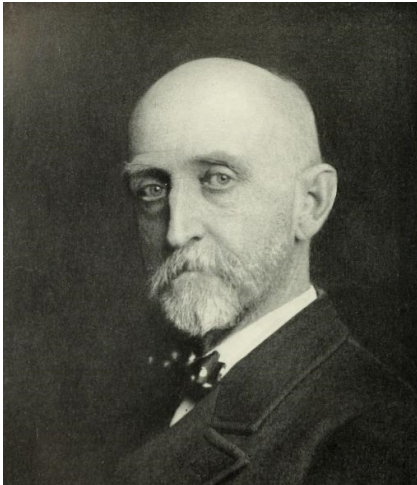
In actual fact, much of that leadership’s sense-making arose from the profound domestic changes taking place in American society and her economy occasioned by and since the Union victory in the Civil War. By 1900, America was no longer simply the commercial and agricultural republic of the Founding Fathers. She had become a hierarchical, industrial global powerhouse. Opinion-makers and the leadership of the day wrestled over how to square traditional national ideals—ideals that had heretofore inspired a reflexively commercial foreign policy and eschewed entangling alliances—with the demands of contemporary reality in pursuit of long-term national interest. Arising from this ferment came Progressive-era national consolidations in industry, New York finance and the Federal government. As part of this second American revolution, our national leaders instituted new governance structures and processes in the Executive Branch, the Federal Reserve System and a sea-control Steel Navy supported by a nascent military-industrial complex, as dramatically evidenced by the 1916 Naval Expansion Act of 1916 after Woodrow Wilson’s call for “a navy second to none.”

To be sure, our abiding national ideals have given the American people a national identity that formed the soul of our nation and spiritually bind us together today. Both our Revolutionary- and Progressive-era national ideals speak to a free people whose constituted governance includes the fostering of the equitable pursuit of prosperity and wealth. As a practical matter, though, it has been the Nation’s foundational enterprises that have enabled most Americans to prosper individually and generate community and national wealth. They are the core sinews of our economy that have corporately facilitated all of our economic, financial and knowledge-based activities accounting for American wealth, innovation and transformation.

Our national ideals certainly inspire pursuit of long-term American interest. Alone, however, they are not sufficient to drive or sustain it—whatever the official statements of strategic guidance or declaratory policies of the moment. The primary drivers for that national quest are the aggregate, visceral interests of our core sinews at the national level—those portions of the U.S. economic base that are critical to its viability, prosperity and growth. These interests thus prove to be our immanent national interest—whether or not explicitly articulated, e.g., as grand strategy.

Throughout the American Century, the high-industrial sinews of our political economy were variously and progressively the enterprises of steel, railroads, automobiles, oil, media, utilities, aerospace, electronics and nuclear technology. In a dynamic that began more or less after the Civil War, these enterprises built on one another. From them, national leaderships arose, matured and morphed as the nature of the economic base itself transformed with the rise and fall of various sectors of the economy.

When America entered as a maritime power-player on the world stage, her national interest was determined and effected by the first generation of highly-placed acolytes of the preeminent strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan: notably Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge, Elihu Root and John Hay.¹ Following them



throughout the American Century were succeeding generations of great-power practitioners: Henry Stimson, Bernard Baruch, James Forrestal, Averell Harriman and the “Wise Men,” Paul Nitze, author of the National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68)—the strategic guidance that configured the build-up of our military element to lead and execute the Cold War containment strategy—and self-styled economic strategist George Shultz, to name a few. They and others became known as the foreign policy establishment that was intimately connected with the highest levels of national finance—New York-based—interlocked with the core sinews as they evolved.

This establishment influenced capital formation and the generation of U.S. national wealth that provided the foundations for America’s 20th century global power. Those like Stimson represented foundational wealth. Those like Harriman individually or corporately had inherited or accumulated wealth. Capital went to the means of production and distribution and to technological innovation, while also going to build national infrastructure and advance education. To be sure, not all applications of capital were central to the process of national-wealth generation, such as those investments that were purely speculative or in real property, art, etc. Yet it was Wall Street’s concentrated, long-term investments that fueled the core sinews enabling them as foundational enterprises to be the engines of expansion.

This foreign policy establishment identified through the 20th century what to vision as national opportunities and threats. Its members created the governance to effect policies and courses of action based on our high-industrial, aggregate, visceral interests. They did

¹ Cf. David M. Abshire, “Alfred Thayer Mahan: America’s First Grand Strategist” George W. Anderson Leadership Lecture (28 February 2011), p. 8.

so both proactively and in response to challenges. What evolved were high-level public and private consensus networks for policy-planning that had institutional power. Through and within them, representatives of the leaderships—and on occasion members of the leaderships themselves—drove and sustained the interests of the core sinews, shaping the institutions of governance and directing their processes via all the elements of national power.

Progressive governance and policies came to define the high-industrial America throughout the American Century. From the First World War, the United States emerged a creditor nation. Leveraging the financial power of New York, a succeeding generation of national leadership worked with Great Britain's in an attempt to use private sector-led monetary diplomacy to reconstruct the postwar world. The foreign policy establishment embraced what the world had begun to call collective security. The more parochial interests of the nation in the interwar period, nonetheless, forced it to adhere to the traditional American tenet that was averse to foreign entanglements.

In 1945, following the calamitous Great Depression and total war, the balance of popular attitudes changed. America finally arrived as the world's single globally predominant power—industrially, financially and militarily. In the years immediately after World War Two, this generation of leaders was able to persuade the American people to accept collective security—at least in principle. They forged a bipartisan foreign policy consensus whose purpose was to shape the international strategic and economic environment with our wartime allies. They did so via the United Nations (U.N.) and the institutions and agreements established at the U.N.'s monetary and financial conference, known familiarly as Bretton Woods. Their primary mechanisms were to be public sector-led monetary diplomacy and free trade.

Yet within two years, the Soviet Union confronted the United States as an ideological and military rival that presented a threat to Western Europe and would soon present a geostrategic threat to the American homeland. Departing from the long tradition of commercial diplomacy and the pure monetary diplomacy of the interwar period, America's foreign policy establishment elevated the military element of national power beyond providing for the common defense and shifted to a foreign policy that emphasized national and collective security with the Nation's first peacetime military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Building upon four decades of Progressive governance, the Executive Branch and lawmakers had institutionalized via the National Security Act of 1947 new structures and processes through which America would pursue her long-term interest until the end of the Cold War.

Throughout the American Century, the United States waged two world wars and the Cold War in the context of its high-industrial era. Its immanent national interest was Progressive-driven: at bottom, America pursued export-led growth and aimed to augment her own abundant continental resources by securing critical materials overseas for her means of production. Furthering that immanent interest was the military element of national power, the Navy, Army and stepchild Air Force—all evolving expressions of an advancing U.S. techno-industrial base. As the maritime force of a maritime power, the Navy evolved as the gun-club, carrier, missile and nuclear Navy, configured and postured to control the seas and project power—to be sure, serving strategic deterrence all the while.

In the 1950s, President Dwight Eisenhower's guidance for Cold-War deterrence and ideological competition, known as the Great Equation, aimed to strike a balance

between a sufficiently resourced defense and a vibrant and prospering economy. America, however, lost that balance in the sixties when Lyndon Johnson succumbed to a guns-and-butter hubris that squandered billions of dollars in a fruitless land war in Vietnam and committed billions more to the social programs of the Great Society. By the early seventies, Richard Nixon's management of the consequences of that sixties' overreach grievously fractured the Progressive consensus that had driven U.S. foreign policy since Franklin Roosevelt. Still, the foreign policy establishment—though further riven in two by Watergate—was able to maintain geostrategic focus on the Soviet Union until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Once victorious over the Soviets, America in the 1990s enjoyed what some called her unipolar moment. As our leaders had attempted immediately after the Second World War, so the post-Cold War U.S. leaderships first appeared to opt for shaping the world via economic and public sector-led financial diplomacy. They deemphasized national security and proffered a peace dividend for the American people. Militarily, they conducted the First Gulf War inherently as leaders of a maritime power present in the region, exercising preponderant power at the head of an ad hoc coalition of the willing. As for land-based collective security in Europe, they went so far as to underwrite NATO expansion—in hindsight perhaps too provocatively.

Beneath these presumed unipolar successes, America's morphing Wall Street and Washington leaderships post-Cold War revealed themselves to be something other than pure extensions of the pre-Vietnam-era establishment—despite appearances. Absent a geostrategic threat comparable to the Soviet Union, cross-cutting fault lines deepened through the nineties to reveal divisions over strategic assessment and the interpretation of national interest.

Nonetheless, under the rubric of democratic enlargement, America remained implicitly expansionist. The national leaders who rose in the Clinton administration opted to effect expansionism via markets, principally financial. Capitalizing on 9/11, those who came to power in the Bush II administration determined to effect expansion in the Islamic world by military force. America thus embarked on the notionally-NATO Operation Enduring Freedom and Second Gulf War with barely a coalition of the unwilling.

The worsening and unintended consequences of these ongoing Eurasian interventions persist today, clouding our future. Arab Spring revealed an initial paralysis and subsequent confusion in our still-fractured foreign policy establishment. Today, our divided leadership enjoys no consensus on what now is America's interest in much of the arc of Islam. American leaders as well disagree over the degree to which the military should play a direct role in the compounding religious war between Shiites and Sunnis that could potentially intensify to a level comparable to Europe's Thirty Years' War of the 17th century.

All the while, since the end of the Cold War, the world has dramatically accelerated its transformation into a globalized international economy that is the basis of a new global system regulated by a variety of international regimes. At the same time, the United States and other developed nations are passing from the industrial era into the Information Age with its networked, non-hierarchical, globally interconnected societies that increasingly run on the Internet. This tectonic shift is on a scale equivalent to that which took place around 1900 with America's passage into her high-industrial stage built on steel, railroads and the Big Navy.

America's 21st century sinews are knowledge-based. National finance is now interlocked with today's foundational information technology sectors and academe. This Information Age with its globalized new economy has brought forth more complex interpretations of national interest, some of which reflect merely sub-national narratives or expressions of identity politics. America's immanent national interest is more abstract: to maintain our means of consumption and provision of services and to guarantee U.S.-imposed norms governing the international system of valued-added trade and investment.

World history has entered an entirely new era that will abide with us for the long-term, perhaps until the next game-changing advance in technology. All along—as throughout the American Century—opportunities and threats will come and go. A century ago, our forebears guided their generation through a glass darkly. During our nation's second revolution, they helped birth the Progressive, high-industrial America. Yet no longer do their 20th century Progressive-era ideals, institutions and policies appear to be capable of managing today's post-industrial challenges, visioning their resolution or interpreting and pursuing the long-term interest that is immanent to the Nation. Like those forebears of a century past, our generation too is struggling over a profound crisis of sense-making. In what will be this, our third American revolution, opinion-makers and leaders of our day will—among other things—similarly re-conceptualize nationhood and governance, war and preparedness and the military element of national power.

As we Americans go through this sense-making process, we must accept an uncomfortable truth. No longer have we the geostrategic preponderance of the 1940s that enabled us to shape the postwar global environment. In 1950, the Nation was fully capable of resourcing Nitze's NSC-68. In the post-Cold War 1990s, we appeared preponderant in our unipolar moment. But in decade two of the 21st century, unipolarity is over. No more is the United States globally preeminent. We are challenged industrially. We are challenged financially. And as regard to military challenges, no near-term national security budgets will rise to the level of the NSC-68 percentages of 1950s-era Federal budgets or gross national product sufficient to resource any regaining of credible global military preponderance.

As the economically stressed British found necessary a half a century ago, our fiscally constrained America is at her East-of-Suez moment. American leaders must accordingly triage our national interests and refashion grand strategy to be consonant with our third-stage, immanent interest. It follows that they must reconfigure the military—the most costly element of national power—more narrowly to serve that foundational interest.

Looking outward to the international strategic environment, America now contends with three geostrategic forces—a rising China, a revanchist Russia and a resurgent, but divided Islam. All three are expansionist rivals of varying degrees that want to change the 21st century global system, first fashioned by the U.S. foreign policy establishment and its wartime allies of the 1940s. Analogies to the Cold War, however, do not apply. Though China and Russia are continental hegemonies both with their strategic deterrents, they are not our ideological rivals. Radical Islam may be, however, but itself divided, it is a long way from being comparable to a Soviet Union that was a very present geostrategic, nuclear threat to our homeland and conventional threat to Western Europe.

Some quarters of our leadership eager to confront these three expansionist forces have reinvested the notion that America is exceptional. Their critics counter that American Exceptionalism was relevant only to a time when our national sense-making viewed

international politics in terms of a New-World America versus an Old-World Europe. Some dismiss Exceptionalism with various convergence theories. Still others aver that democratic enlargement when coupled with policies of preemption or regime-change and forcefully applied to the Middle East in particular is itself an ideological challenge that generates its own counter-response.

Going down these paths of analyses obscures the more objective historical and geopolitical understandings of our time. For a 21st century, post-industrial, information society that is our maritime-power America, geographic expansionism has lesser meaning; communities of interest are borderless, and spheres of interest are not simply framed geographically. In any case, for maritime powers, the hegemonic taking and holding of territory—whether or not in concert with others—is very, very costly at the best of times.

For almost three-quarters of a century, Americans have been used to thinking in terms of a grand strategy for the Cold War containment and readiness for Eurasian land wars. We have forgotten that—other than during the Cold War—the American republic has primarily pursued her long-term national interest through commercial diplomacy.

Eisenhower himself corrected some of the strident and costly militarization associated with NSC-68 with his Great Equation that strove to balance commercial, financial and military diplomacy. Our contemporary geo-economic strategist Pascal Lorot is a kindred advocate of commercial economic strategies that advance national enterprises—a nation’s core sinews—as they develop, acquire and commercialize technologies in the global economic system.

America’s geostrategic advantage lies in the fact that she is both a continental and maritime power that has benefitted from a Mahanian legacy dating from a 1900s-era navalism. Rather than comparing our epoch to the Cold War era, the better analog to inform how to use this advantage comes from Great Britain and the Royal Navy in centuries past. In their pre-industrial, commercial 18th century, the British used naval force to sustain the Atlantic System. In her industrial, imperial 19th century, Britannia ruled the waves to secure her worldwide investments and trade with colonies on which the sun never set. Great maritime nations demand the exercise of seapower. The primary mission of the Royal Navy was thus command of the seas.

As a non-imperial power and democratic republic, America pursued 20th century expansion not for colonies, the appearance of her hemispheric interventions notwithstanding. More than rule, whatever the jingoist rhetoric of the day, her maritime annexations and trusteeships had to do with strategic basing and coaling stations, whereby the Navy could help secure spheres of influence where Americans were commercially active and invested.

In this post-industrial Information Age, the Bretton Woods legacy institutions think in more abstract terms of supply-chain trade involving global value chains for goods, services, investment, know-how and people. Our naval leadership has recently been using a Mahanian term when they speak of the global maritime commons as the Navy’s medium of maneuver. In terms of commerce, some 80 percent of international trade by volume goes by sea. The 21st century global system thus depends on a maritime commons that is globally secure and functions with predictability. And our maritime America with her United States Navy and its global network of navies are the guarantors.

Navalism best serves commercial diplomacy. The U.S. grand strategy for the 21st century is at bottom a maritime strategy to assure—with our allies and partners—command

of the global commons for the commercial use in peacetime, for sea control in war. Yet guided by a maritime strategy, a maritime power must always master the temptation to be Napoleonic ashore.

Especially in times of financial duress, the prudent course for a great maritime power is one that serves and sustains its long-term national interest through a strategy of offshore balancing. London's Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) put forth that case in a 2014 article, when it observed that "offshore balancing is much less costly than more interventionist grand strategies."² "Sea power is intrinsically benign," posited the very Mahanian RUSI author, "insofar as it generates security without threatening others' overall political survival....[S]ea control...does not threaten other states' or armed groups' internal political order; it also provokes a much less hostile response."³

Addressing the matter of when a strategic environment goes hot, RUSI's assessment at the deck-plate level allowed that the "offshore balancer" would provide "stand-off firepower to local allies, which in practice means some combination of maritime and airborne strike."⁴ It was not the intention of the RUSI article to go into the specifics of emerging strike capabilities, e.g., those provided by the latest missile, rail gun and directed energy (e.g., laser) systems. Nevertheless, our thought processes need to push further into post-industrial warfighting concepts for the Information Age, when considering maritime strike warfare—or any warfare concept for that matter.

Information-Age warfighting concepts emphasize not necessarily destruction but rather disruption—disruption of systems. Military experts are moving toward what they call non-kinetic, left-of-launch concepts, e.g., the use of advanced electronic warfare (EW), electromagnetic (EM) propagation and jamming systems and most especially cyber attacks. In their 2015 Maritime Strategy, the Sea Services spoke of all domain access for joint force commanders "to defeat the system rather than countering individual weapons." The Navy's concept, what it is now calling electromagnetic maneuver warfare (EMW) operations, is one element that supports access.

Again, a properly conceived national interest reflects the foundational sinews and national establishment of the era. It informs implicit long-term grand strategy. The most effective and sustainable investments for reconfiguring the military element are those that leverage the innovative growth-sectors of the economy where capital is already going, i.e., the enterprises that are its foundation.

The rise of steel as the preeminent core sinew in the late 19th century drove establishment of the continental railroad system and the reconfigured Big Navy, both consummate expressions of steel in the industrial era. So too in this Information Age, the military element must similarly be an expression of the core sinews that are IT-driven.

Today, cyber-technology innovation is beginning to inform warfighting concepts and determine strategy, tactics and operations. Competitive advantage in the cyberspace domain underpins warfighting capabilities in all others—maritime, land, air and space. The United States has the potential—if realized and resourced—to dominate militarily this domain. Advancing cyber-capabilities are well suited to the full spectrum of Information-

² David Blagden "Sea Power is Benign Power: The International Case for a Maritime Posture" *RUSI Journal* (June 2014) Vol. 159, No. 3, p. 58.

https://www.rusi.org/publications/journal/rss/ref:A53B15AF9D7CB5/#.U_E8QIZCFI

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 57.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Age, joint warfighting—from what is now being called hybrid war to the conventional and strategic high-end. The cyberspace domain is where contesting international political actors may fight the post-industrial *guerre de course* that in the realm of financial warfare could extend to what could be called a *guerre de bourse*.

Whatever such cyberspace speculations, a third-stage America—well into the Information Age—is still a maritime power. Already, the fleet is the enabling network node of an information dominant, joint maritime force. Fully resourced and rightly reconfigured as the primary expression of this era’s core IT sinews, the United States Navy can command the seas—for offshore balancing and, if necessary, all domain access. A 21st century Cyber Navy thus promises to be the premier element for executing maritime strategy for an East-of-Suez America.

