

1949

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### Recommended Citation

Miller, George H. (1949) "Sea Power is World Power," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 2 : No. 3 , Article 2.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol2/iss3/2>

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## **SEA POWER IS WORLD POWER**

An article by

*Commander George H. Miller, U. S. Navy*

As the United States stands on the threshold of what may one day be known as her Golden Age it might be well for us to look back over the road which has led our country to its present position of world leadership. Today we are the most powerful nation on earth, and there is little doubt that much of the credit for this growth can be laid to our fortunate geographic position. Situated between two great oceans, the United States is unmistakably a maritime power. Our forefathers, who crossed the seas to found our nation, were seafaring people. They derived their living from the sea, and it is because of the sea that our nation grew and prospered. The seas have given us security and economic stability, and these two elements are wholly related, one to the other.

As we grew, we enjoyed the tacit protection of the British Navy. And it was because of the maternalistic attitude, and possibly the preoccupation, of the British that we were permitted to use the seas without having to pay our way. In other words we were given a free ride by the British Navy. For example, we propounded the Monroe Doctrine and were able, by obtaining the support of the British, to make it stick. Later we built a great fleet of clipper ships without having to bear the expense of a huge navy to protect them. In World War I, we were able to fight an overseas war chiefly because the British Fleet was there to run interference for us.

Between World War I and World War II we were able to build a tactical navy designed to defeat the Japanese Fleet in a

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fleet action. During this period all our talent was devoted to the problem of defeating the Japanese Fleet in the Pacific, while in the Atlantic our thinking went very little beyond the Neutrality Patrol. As for the rest of the world, we let the British worry about that. So long as the British looked out for things elsewhere we did not have to think seriously about problems of maritime strategy—or global strategy.

Thus our navy was a tactical navy, superbly trained and, we believed, ready to fight. Fleet training and fleet readiness were given top priority. They were our primary objectives in our peacetime training for war.

Today we face a different situation. The British are unable to carry their former share of the load. We in the United States are finding it necessary to assume more and more of the responsibility for world stability. And so if anyone is going to do any serious thinking about the uses and implications of sea power it must be the United States.

It is because of our unchallenged position as the dominant sea power that we are today the greatest power on the face of the earth. It is because of this control of the seas that we are able to exert our influence in most of the important areas of the earth. And in case of war sea power places at our disposal most of the resources, the populations, and the industrial capacity of the world. We need only look at the Globe to remind ourselves that wherever the oceans touch the shores, the United States exerts a powerful influence for world stability. Consequently, so long as we control the seas, our frontiers, unlike those of a land power, lie across the seas rather than at our own borders.

Now we are witnessing an amazing paradox. Here is a nation, born and brought up by the sea, a nation which is today one

of the greatest sea powers the world has ever known; and her people are beginning to forget it. Why has this happened?

One reason for this apparent confusion of thought is the fact that we are in the midst of an industrial revolution. In the last hundred years, civilization has advanced further in the technical field than it has in all previous recorded history. We have moved so fast that our military thinking has not been able to keep pace with the development of new weapons. We are tending to become so preoccupied with the technical aspects of warfare that our strategic thinking suffers.

In the midst of this technical advance, we find the British forced to relinquish their position as the dominant sea power. We in the Navy were just not ready for the task that was thereby handed to us. Up to this time, we had always been a tactical Navy, free to occupy ourselves with our own little problems, while the British worried about the rest of the world. Fleet training and fleet readiness have always taken priority over higher education in naval strategy. As a result, we do not have in our Navy or in our country today any sizeable group of recognized naval strategists. We have never really needed these strategic thinkers until now; and we just do not have them.

We have a wealth of technical experts who have no equal in any other nation. We have aviation specialists, amphibious specialists, submarine specialists, anti-submarine specialists, atomic energy specialists, and electronic specialists, but we just do not have enough people with a clear understanding of sea power and maritime strategy. Without such understanding these many elements of military power cannot be properly integrated into a pattern of national security.

Along with our rapid technical development there has grown up among our people a sincere desire to turn from considerations

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of national security to the more constructive pursuits of peace. There has been a natural tendency to look around for a simple formula by which our national security problems could be solved. Some have suggested that the simple solution to our problem lies in the large-scale use of the atomic bomb. We recognize in this proposal the theory of the blitzkrieg, the quick, easy victory idea, that has always seemed so attractive to the uninformed. It is the old land-power concept of the "putsch", which depends so much on being able to obtain the quick surrender of the enemy. But if the enemy fails to surrender according to plan, the blitzkrieg fails, and the attacker is faced with a totally different kind of a war, a kind for which he is not prepared. He finds himself fighting the kind of war the enemy wants to fight, and the result in this case could very well be final defeat.

And thus today we are attempting to solve our national security problems through poorly conceived concepts, rather than through a clear understanding of geography and strategy. We as a nation are attempting to ignore the very existence of three-quarters of the surface of the earth—the seas, by which we have grown to our present position of world power.

The truth of the matter is that we in the Armed Forces have stood by while these unsound concepts were being pressed. We simply did not have the people who understood the significance of the seas to our national life well enough to spell it out for the American people.

We can go even one step further. In some instances, we in the Navy have helped promote these false concepts. During the confusion that followed the initial use of atomic weapons, there were those in our own service who came forward to assert that from now on wars would be fought exclusively below the surface of the seas, or in the skies. And there was one of our wartime captains who is

reputed to have said, "I am retiring because there is no longer any need for a navy."

As a result of our failure to keep our thinking abreast of new developments the American people are beginning to lose sight of the vital significance of the sea areas of the world to their national security and prosperity. There is a growing tendency to turn from the sea and to accept the far more costly security measures peculiar to land powers. Some current concepts, instead of welcoming and exploiting to the fullest the free, easy road of the sea, seek to avoid its use. Yet, by the very facts of geography we are a maritime power. To reach the rest of the world in peace or in war, we must first cross the seas; for others to reach us they, too, must first cross the seas.

In peace and in war the maritime power holds a tremendous economic advantage over the land power. The significant phenomenon of sea power is that we can build a huge tub, or hull, and float it on the surface of the water. It floats by itself; it requires no power to keep it afloat. This huge tub can be filled with cargo—or bombs, or airplanes, or soldiers—and with relatively little power can be moved to almost any point on the surface of the earth. There are no rail or road beds to maintain, no mountains to cross, no tunnels to dig. And as our civilization continues to develop more ways will be found to use this cheap, easy road of the sea.

Water transportation is by far the most economical means of transportation known to Man. By conservative estimate it is two times as economical as land transportation and thirty-four times as economical as air transportation. To take a specific example, one oil company estimates that it costs twenty times as much to transport petroleum products by rail as it does by water. Thus the cost of transporting petroleum products by air would be over three

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hundred times the cost by water. When we realize that our overseas transportation during five years of the past war amounted to approximately 676 billion ton-miles and that about two thirds of this total consisted of petroleum products we can readily see the economic advantage of gearing our war and peacetime transportation to the sea.

War is fundamentally a problem of transportation, the problem of transporting weapons—whether they be in the form of bombs, projectiles or bayonets—to the point where they will exert the greatest influence on the enemy. It would therefore seem prudent that we plan, in the event of war, to transport our weapons as close as possible to our objective by sea, shifting to more expensive means of transportation only when sufficient resistance develops to prevent further movement by water. By projecting our air forces and ground forces at the end of sea lines of communication a smaller percentage of the national wealth is expended for transportation. For every dollar expended for our military establishment we would thereby assure ourselves of more hitting power at the point of contact with the enemy. In order to assure ourselves of the tremendous advantages inherent in water transportation it therefore seems reasonable that our primary *national* objective in peace or in war is to maintain control of the seas. Any threat to this control should be considered as the major threat to our national security.

What steps are we taking to clarify our thinking on the subject of sea power? Even today there are few in our Navy, or in the country at large, who see the critical need for a serious study of sea power and naval strategy. There are few who realize that a basic understanding of sea power is a matter of grave concern to every citizen of the United States. For the day we as a nation relinquish our supremacy on the seas is the day we begin our decline.

Today there are relatively few in the Navy who fully understand the implications of sea power. Before we can carry this message to the other services and to the people of the United States we must first educate ourselves. Unless the study of sea power is pursued vigorously and continuously with the best minds available in the country we cannot expect to maintain our dominating position in the world. This is a matter of immediate concern to the people of the United States. The best talent and the best equipment in the country must be made available to work on the problem of maintaining our position on the seas.

The study of sea power and naval strategy is an undertaking that should be given the highest priority. It is a project as urgent as the study and development of anti-submarine warfare, guided missiles, or atomic energy. Unless our strategic thinking is the best in the world all the new weapons we are developing cannot save us.

The case for sea power was never so strong as it is today. It is the single factor governing our present position as a World Power. The implications of sea power for our future go far beyond anything we can now comprehend. We in the Navy must be the first to recognize and understand this fact.

We Americans might also remind ourselves that it is not inevitable that the United States maintain indefinitely her present position of world supremacy; we are not immune to decadence. For even though our scientific progress has been nothing short of remarkable, we are not a race of supermen. Nor are we specially endowed with some supernatural immunity from human error. We as a nation are vulnerable to the same error, the same pitfalls as are other communities of human beings.



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History is filled with the epitaphs of nations which, though blessed with favorable maritime positions, chose to turn their backs on the sea. We hold in our own hands the destiny of our country; and in our minds lay the seeds of our own destruction. The quality of our strategic thinking today may well determine whether the life of these United States will be measured in centuries—or in decades.