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“DECIDED PREPONDERANCE AT SEA”

Naval Diplomacy in Strategic Thought

Commander Kevin Rowlands, Royal Navy

Oliver Cromwell famously declared that “a man-o’-war is the best ambassador”; a twenty-first-century equivalent represents the U.S. Navy in posters and on T-shirts and sweatshirts as an aircraft carrier over the caption “90,000 tons of diplomacy.” Though the images may be different, the message is the same—yet “naval diplomacy” is not a readily understood term. From the coercion delivered by the gunboats of the Pax Britannica to the modern-day exercise of *soft* power through *hardware*, interpretations of what constitutes naval diplomacy are wide-ranging. Strategists have undoubtedly long been aware of its existence, but over the centuries few have been moved to study or document it in any substantial way.

The purpose of this article is to establish what has been written about this important dimension of international politics so that it can be better understood

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and better implemented, or countered, in future. The political (or diplomatic) role of sea power has always been important and, arguably, far more commonly exercised than its wartime uses. Indeed, it is unique to navies and has no parallel on land or in the air. But examination of naval strategy exposes a knowledge gap: the major works of Mahan, Corbett, and others are filled with the preparation for, and the conduct of, war at sea, but most offer little more than an oblique reference to what navies have historically done on a day-to-day, year-by-year basis.

Mahan in his classic work talks of naval “prestige” and “flying the flag,” but in passing. Corbett similarly

acknowledges peacetime employment but does not concentrate on it. Indeed, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century—the era of the Cold War—that naval diplomacy started to be studied in its own right, but that study was, of course, tempered by the geopolitical situation of the time. Cable, Booth, and Luttwak in the West and Gorshkov in the East placed naval diplomacy in the realm of their own understandings. But was their era, that of the Cold War, really representative of a long historical development in naval thought, or could it have been a historical “blip”?

Today, the combined fleets of the West effectively exercise command of the oceans, with few regional powers capable of contesting the seas even locally. These fleets’ position of strength has arguably led to a subtle shift in their role along the spectrum of conflict from major combat operations back to constabulary and diplomatic tasks.¹ Though no direct peer competitors yet exist, rising powers, particularly in the East, are developing credible maritime strategies not wholly based on war fighting. Whether these powers are seeking to join the existing international system or to challenge it remains to be seen. The Cold War ended over twenty years ago, and it has taken time for a new global order to become clear, and it might not be clear yet. For navies this shift in emphasis and increasing focus on “influence” may not be a new phenomenon.

This article takes “naval diplomacy” to mean the exertion of influence on international affairs through naval power when not at war. It attempts to trace the historiography of naval diplomacy through strategic thought and determine whether there has been a return to the use of navies as peacetime policy instruments of the state and tools of grand strategy, or whether it is merely business as usual in the twenty-first century.

MAHAN, CORBETT, AND CLASSICAL NAVAL DIPLOMACY

The classic naval texts are essentially Atlanticist in nature, reflecting the concentration of maritime power, first in Europe and then in North America. Nonetheless, they offer some generic principles that are applicable globally. Perhaps the most influential naval writer, Alfred Thayer Mahan, focused his thesis in *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* on navies at war, particularly the navies of England, France, and the United Provinces in the age of sail, and he did not specifically mention naval diplomacy. However, peppered throughout his work are examples and comments on the utility of threat and limited force by navies. In particular, Mahan acknowledges the importance of navies in peacetime, observing that the requirement for naval strategy differs from that for a land-centric military strategy in that the former is as necessary in peace as in war.²

Examination of Mahan’s work for reference to what amounts to naval diplomacy—even if the term is not used—reveals two broad themes. In the contemporary

language of "hard" and "soft" power, Mahan could arguably be said to view navies both as instruments of coercion and as agents of national reputation. In the early sections of his major work Mahan writes of ancient Rome during the Carthaginian wars, discussing how the Roman fleet was positioned to "check" Macedonia, an ally of Hannibal, and was so successful in doing so that "not a soldier of the phalanx ever set foot in Italy."³ The principle employed by this threatening naval force was one of prevention and deterrence. Similarly, coercion through overt presence and shows of greatness was applied when "Roman fleets . . . visited the coasts of Africa."⁴ Great-power deterrence, manifest in Mahan's history, can be considered a significant form of naval diplomacy. Even in antiquity Thucydides, author of that great foundation of strategic studies *The Peloponnesian War*, attributes the growth of Athenian power to its fleet and its limited sorties throughout the Aegean: "The navies [of] . . . the period," he wrote in the first chapter of the first book, were "the greatest power to those who cultivated them."⁵

Mahan, in a later work, a collection of articles published at the turn of the twentieth century, applied his own thesis to contemporary events. The Boxer Rebellion of 1898–1901 against Western imperialism in China, for example, threatened free trade and risked "the interest of the commercial nations and of maritime powers."⁶ Without resorting to total war, the West used limited military force extensively. An eight-nation alliance mounted naval intervention, policing, and stabilization expeditions along the coast of China and inland up the major river systems, particularly the Yangtze, to quash the uprising.⁷ Two forms of naval diplomacy can be seen at play in turn-of-the-century China: the show of limited force by the strong to the weak and the building of coalitions. In another series of essays Mahan expands on coalition building, discussing the "possibilities of an Anglo-American reunion" and seeing the opportunities for cooperative progress in the common ground of sea power.⁸

That some states were ready and able to mount sea actions while others were not is worthy of mention. Mahan identified character, both of a nation and of a government, as an essential element of sea power. The willingness to be "bold" and of an "adventurous nature," he asserted, is key. For the age of sail, in which he concentrated his analysis, he compared the characters of England and Holland, the outwardly focused nations of "shopkeepers," with that of France, with its trait of "prudence," concluding that the former were more likely to exercise sea power.⁹ Today this characteristic could be expressed in policy terms as a willingness to be expeditionary; Mahan closely associates this active pursuit of national interest with image, flying the flag, and "prestige." Aggressively won "honor" and "prestige" at sea were not to be ignored; skirmishes on land would more often lead to war than would the flexing of muscles at sea, where, out of sight and unconstrained by geography, they could be used as timely reminders of power.

Mahan's "prestige" factor is perhaps comparable to the power of "attraction" in the more recent words of Joseph Nye, the leading thinker on soft and "smart" power in contemporary international politics.¹⁰ According to Nye military force can produce "behavioral outcomes" even when not used in war: "Success attracts, and a reputation for competence in the use of force helps to attract."¹¹ Prestige and attraction are both about image and perception, not truth. Mahan again: "The decline of prestige may involve as much illusion as its growth; therefore its value, while not to be denied, may be easily exaggerated. Prestige then does not necessarily correspond with fact."¹²

For Mahan, if naval "prestige" were to be perceived to be of political utility to government it needed to be not only widely recognized but also carefully targeted, by timely geographical presence. Though his thesis is laid out in the context of the colonial powers of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, there are unambiguous parallels to other ages, including our own. Naval diplomacy, a form of wider political effort, is a means of communication in power relationships. Mahan's point was that national security in peacetime can be aided by a "decided preponderance at sea."¹³ The influence of Mahan upon history cannot be overstated; it has been vociferously argued that his theories swayed the United States, Japan, and Germany, among others, in the early years of the twentieth century.¹⁴

Writing shortly after Mahan on the other side of the Atlantic, Sir Julian Corbett expanded further on the theories of naval warfare in his book *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*. Like Mahan, Corbett did not specifically ally his principles to operations other than war; indeed, his work has been described as "weak" on law and order at sea in peacetime.¹⁵ Instead he preferred to develop his ideas as "the principles which govern a war in which the sea is a substantial factor."¹⁶ However, he did discuss "limited" war at some length;¹⁷ it could be argued that his theories on blockade, both naval and commercial, and on the strategy of a "fleet in being" could be applied at different points on the spectrum of conflict and thus be effectively used as tools of coercive naval diplomacy.

One manifestation of coercion that Corbett examined was the "demonstration." He considered, for example, the success of a British fleet under Rear Admiral John Purvis cruising off Cádiz in 1808. Purvis's force, by presence, negotiation, and demonstrable capability, "encouraged" Spanish revolt against the French in a way that would not have been available to committed land forces.¹⁸ Demonstration, in the modern sense, is about leverage, and Corbett uses Napoleon's words to underline its effectiveness:¹⁹ "With 30,000 men in transports at the Downs [a relatively shallow area of the North Sea off the southeast coast of England] the English can paralyse 300,000 of my army and that will reduce us to the rank of a second-class power."²⁰

The transports, of course, are naval.

A near contemporary and "disciple" of Corbett was the British admiral and theorist Sir Herbert Richmond.²¹ "Sea power, in its full expression," he wrote, "is a form of national strength capable of giving weight to national policy."²² As for his antecedents, Richmond's focus on war dominates his work, but his thoughts on the peacetime utility of naval force can be found in his pages. He attributes the expansion of the British Empire to naval power and sees it as a means to national greatness and, ultimately, peace: "All the greater naval nations assure the world that a great navy is the surest guarantee of peace; that it gives security against war, and is therefore a highly beneficial institution."²³ Richmond also alerts his readers to (albeit under different terms) other, nonmilitary, naval roles, such as humanitarian relief, noncombatant evacuation, and peace enforcement, which fit the broad continuum of naval diplomacy.²⁴

It is evident that the writers of the classic naval texts understood the utility of naval forces in nonwar scenarios. Terminology may have changed, but "flying the flag" and "prestige" can be equated with influence and the exercise of soft power, while "gunboat diplomacy" and "demonstration" are effectively the forerunners of coercion and coercive diplomacy. Writing at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, neither Mahan nor Corbett could possibly have placed his work in the context of the world a hundred years hence. As far as they were concerned, however, they were recording for posterity the enduring principles of maritime strategy—and in fact, with the benefit of hindsight, later historians added a different perspective that shows the views of the classic naval strategists to have generally stood the test of time.

Multipolarity in global affairs, the world order in Mahan's and Corbett's time, was often not as anarchic as might at first be assumed; it was generally accompanied by the presence of one dominant power. From the eighteenth century until at least the early twentieth, that dominant power was Great Britain, and the Royal Navy enjoyed command of the sea. Robert Keohane has coined the term "hegemonic stability" to describe the situation in which a wider peace is the result of the diplomacy, coercion, and persuasion of the leading power.²⁵ This period of Britain's dominance was commonly referred to as the "Pax Britannica."

Jeremy Black acknowledges the role the naval forces of the hegemonic power could play in maintaining the world order: "Throughout much of the nineteenth century, foreign expectations and fears about British power allowed Britain to get grudging unofficial recognition of the Pax Britannica, the doctrine of the Royal Navy keeping the peace of the sea for all to benefit."²⁶ The Royal Navy acted as a policy instrument of the state through military endeavor and constabulary action, playing, for instance, a decisive role in supporting the government's political objective of the abolition of the slave trade.²⁷ Some writers have labeled the British use of sea power during the Pax Britannica as "altruistic," but this rather

misses the point.²⁸ Britain maintained its leading position in the world through economic strength supported by military, predominantly naval, might. British sea power was used during the period very much in the national interest and thus as an instrument of state power, but the stability it provided was tacitly welcomed by other states as well; it was all the more effective for the Royal Navy's rarely having to resort to high-intensity warfare.

However, Britain's supremacy did not go unchallenged. The pre-First World War naval arms race with Germany, with both sides resorting to using their fleets for geopolitical gain, is well documented. In Germany, Alfred von Tirpitz's vision, as State Secretary of the Imperial Navy Office, of maritime ascendancy inspired the national leadership;²⁹ Kaiser Wilhelm II gave an "imperial performance" to mark Germany's intent to be a world power while at Tangier during a Mediterranean cruise in 1905.³⁰ In the United Kingdom the "Navy Scare" of 1909 (sparked by news of the acceleration of the German naval building program) was used to justify huge increases in the numbers of the Royal Navy's dreadnoughts.³¹ Similarly, at the beginning of the twentieth century the United States sought to claim its place as a first-rank power largely through the expansion of its own navy. Henry Hendrix has documented the rise of the aspiring power in his *Theodore Roosevelt's Naval Diplomacy*, which uses a series of case studies to demonstrate the utility of the naval forces available to the government. Many of the instances were coercive in nature, such as the defense of the Panamanian revolution in 1903 when the province was attempting to gain independence from Colombia, and the heavy-handed deployment of a squadron to Tangier after the kidnapping of an American citizen in Morocco in 1904.³² The crowning glory of the U.S. Navy at the time and the soft-power counterbalance to its coercive diplomacy was in sailing the "Great White Fleet" on a round-the-world influence mission, 1907-1909.³³

CABLE, GORSHKOV, AND NAVAL DIPLOMACY IN A BIPOLAR WORLD

Naval diplomacy continued through the two world wars of the twentieth century, but the political climate of the Cold War perhaps placed more stringent limits on the use of force, certainly between the major blocs, as the strategic focus turned to nuclear deterrence. Though greater utility was attached to the diplomatic role of the military instrument, little academic attention was directed that way; one exception was the work of Sir James Cable. Cable was instrumental in moving the understanding of naval diplomacy forward, but he was essentially a Cold War writer. Though the period of his analysis, presented in three editions of his seminal work *Gunboat Diplomacy*, ran from the end of the First World War to the early 1990s, it was inevitably viewed through a prism of state-to-state relations.

Coercive by definition, his gunboat diplomacy was always "done" by one side to another. It is telling that Cable narrowly defined "gunboat diplomacy" as "the use or threat of use of limited naval force, otherwise than an act of war, in order to secure advantage or to avert loss, either in the furtherance of an international dispute or else against foreign nationals within the territory or the jurisdiction of their own state" and that he chronicled each of the incidents through the seven decades of his study in terms of an "assailant" and a "victim."³⁴ But the reality can be more complex, with a multitude of stakeholders, be they domestic audiences or the international community, directly or indirectly involved in every "incident." Binary it is not.

The robust language used by Cable, a professional diplomat, is an enduring characteristic of his work. He believed that coercion was implicit in most aspects of international relations and that if a government is willing to "reward friends and to punish enemies its wishes will at least receive careful consideration."³⁵ This realist perspective reflects the dominant thinking of the latter half of the Cold War:³⁶ "To be coercive a threat must be more than a generalised prediction of disastrous consequences, however plausible, in the immediate future. It must express readiness to do something injurious to the interest of another government unless that government either takes, or desists from or refrains from some indicated course of action."³⁷

The realist approach also provides a framework within which his model explains coercion at sea. To Cable, gunboat diplomacy could be categorized among four modes, which he discusses in descending order of effectiveness. *Definitive force* he explains as an act or threat of force possessed of an authoritative purpose apparent to both sides. The intent of the employing force must be recognized as limited and must be considered tolerable by the recipient, the "victim"—that is, more desirable than resort to war:³⁸

A government embarking on an act of genuinely limited force should thus have a reasonable expectation that force initially employed will be sufficient to achieve the specific purpose originally envisaged without regard to the reactions of the victim, whose options are thus confined to acquiescence, ineffectual resistance or a retaliation that can only follow, and not prevent, the achievement of the desired result. In such cases, the use of force is not merely limited but is also definitive: it creates a *fait accompli*.³⁹

Purposeful force, according to Cable, is less direct and less reliable than definitive force.⁴⁰ He explains it as limited naval force applied in order to change the policy or character of a foreign government. In itself, he wrote, the force does not do anything; it acts to induce the recipient to take a decision that would not otherwise have been taken.⁴¹

Catalytic force was described by Cable as a case in which limited naval force “lends a hand” so as to catalyze a situation the direction of which has yet to reveal itself.⁴² In essence, he explains it as an act undertaken when there is an underlying feeling that “something is going to happen.”⁴³ Less effective than either definitive or purposeful force, it is more likely, he claimed, to result in failure. Cable is rather ambiguous about the use of catalytic force and labels as such few of the incidents listed in his chronological appendix. One of those few is the bombardment of targets in Beirut by the battleship USS *New Jersey* in 1983, when peace-keeping forces were under threat ashore, though this and other cases could be just as easily be placed in another of Cable’s categories.⁴⁴

The final mode of gunboat diplomacy is that in which warships are employed to emphasize attitudes or to make a point—*expressive force*, which Cable readily dismisses as “the last and least of the uses of limited naval force,” promising only vague and uncertain results.⁴⁵ Cable explains how the “purposeful” can descend into the “expressive” for reasons of domestic political necessity.⁴⁶ His justification for including expressive force as a category was simply that it was commonly employed, affording governments vehicles for visual manifestation of their positions with little political commitment. Effectively, however, his justification underlines the particular advantages of naval forces as communicative tools and runs counter to his own low opinion of their worth in that capacity.

The first edition of *Gunboat Diplomacy*, published in 1971, received praise that was still alive thirty-five years later. Richard Hill, for instance, opined in 2006 that Cable’s work “sharpened to a point the theory and experience of ‘effectiveness short of war’ and reminded navies of what they had been *doing* rather than what they had been training for.”⁴⁷ Subsequently, the 1970s saw if not a torrent, at least a stream of other works building the understanding of naval diplomacy in the West, the most notable of which were by Edward Luttwak and Ken Booth.

Luttwak, an American strategist, published *The Political Uses of Sea Power* in 1974. The book, though short, ranges widely and debates the use of armed forces in general before settling on naval power. Rather than be constrained by concepts such as coercion and deterrence, Luttwak adopts the term “suasion” to frame his arguments. Suasion, he writes, is a “conveniently neutral term . . . whose meaning suggests the indirectness of any political application of naval force.”⁴⁸ Under the umbrella of naval suasion Luttwak placed a spectrum of operations, from routine deployment to “deliberate action.” At what might be called the “softer” end, where he situates routine deployments, navies can deliver local deterrent or supportive functions. Luttwak labels this end of the spectrum “latent suasion,” and it correlates well with Cable’s expressive force; some later commentators subsumed it into wider defense diplomacy. Deliberate action, the “active” side of Luttwak’s spectrum, corresponding to definitive or purposeful force in Cable’s terminology,

was further broken down into the positive and negative of coercive elements—respectively, compellence and deterrence.⁴⁹

Luttwak's work was very much a product of the Cold War and was obviously influenced by Cable and the theorist Thomas Schelling (both are acknowledged), but it is perhaps less politically impartial than that of the earlier writers. Luttwak discussed differences in perceptions of military strength between the Western and Eastern blocs as U.S. "self-denigration";⁵⁰ he criticized "declining" American influence in the Middle East;⁵¹ and he identified increasing multipolarity during the 1970s *détente*—a conclusion that seems prescient if somewhat premature when read nearly four decades later.⁵²

Edward Luttwak certainly added to the debate on naval diplomacy in the 1970s. However, he did not enjoy the same success among practitioners as did other commentators, like Cable, whose work fed directly into the maritime doctrines of most Western navies, perhaps because the basis of Luttwak's theory of "suasion" was in practice its main limitation. Luttwak robustly emphasized the importance of image and perception over capability, dedicating a whole chapter to "visibility and viability" and arguing, for instance, that "to frighten South Yemen or encourage the Sheik of Abu Dhabi one does not need a powerful sonar under the hull or a digital data system in the superstructure."⁵³ The proposition had merit but did not necessarily fit into the political or military narrative of the time. Critics have dismissed with relative ease such assertions as simplistic, pointing to a range of examples of perceived weaker navies who have succeeded over stronger maritime powers. A case in point was the success of the Icelandic Coast Guard against Britain during the "Cod Wars."⁵⁴

Ken Booth's *Navies and Foreign Policy*, published in 1977, drew on Luttwak's ideas, which he acknowledged as "useful," but went farther.⁵⁵ The work is significant in that it introduced the "trinity of naval functions," a phrase that has since been incorporated into the formal doctrine of the British, American, Canadian, and Australian navies, among others.⁵⁶ The concept suggests that naval forces have three main roles: military, policing, and diplomatic. Within the diplomatic role, which Booth defines as "concerned with the management of foreign policy short of actual employment of force," a state's political objectives are realized through subsidiary means: negotiation through strength, manipulation, and prestige.⁵⁷ The latter, he concedes, is "invariably a by-product" of the others.⁵⁸

Booth approached the utility of navies from a functional perspective and identified seven key characteristics of warships as diplomatic instruments: versatility, controllability, mobility, projection ability, access potential, symbolism, and endurance.⁵⁹ Taking the characteristics and applying them to operations, he posited five basic tenets of naval diplomacy, which he subdivided into two groups. The first group, which he termed "naval power politics," encompassed

standing demonstrations of naval power and specific operational deployments. The second group, “naval influence politics,” consisted of naval aid, operational visits, and specific goodwill visits.⁶⁰ It is worthy of note that Booth’s understanding of naval diplomacy, contrary to Cable’s, gravitates to the less coercive end of the spectrum. If fitted to Luttwak’s model it tends toward latent suasion.

As Western thinkers debated naval diplomacy, discussing themes from coercion to cooperation, Eastern bloc opinions were also forming. Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union Sergey Gorshkov, the “architect” of the Cold War fleet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), personally guided the development of the navy for nearly thirty years, capturing in the late 1970s his thoughts in his major work, *The Sea Power of the State*.⁶¹

His theory was born out of study as well as observation and experience. Gorshkov was a student of naval history, certainly patriotic, and a keen watcher of the West.⁶² In his discussion of the development of the Soviet fleet he was unambiguously nationalistic and defensive; indeed, the opening chapter of his book is an out-and-out attack on imperialism and capitalism. However, it is striking how Gorshkov used examples of the West’s successful diplomatic use of navies to convince the leaders of the land-focused USSR of the utility of sea power. Gorshkov implied that Soviet naval growth after 1945 had been in direct response to American naval advances and not simply designed for the furtherance of Soviet foreign policy.⁶³ Nonetheless, he used his knowledge of Western maritime strategy to introduce a forward-presence mission to a fleet that had traditionally concentrated on coastal defensive tactics. He intuitively understood that the navy could be extremely useful in operations other than war: “Demonstrative actions by the navy in many cases have made it possible to achieve political ends without resorting to armed struggle. . . . The navy has always been an instrument of the policy of states, an important aid to diplomacy in peacetime.”⁶⁴ Also, mirroring other naval thinkers, he associated maritime strength with national prestige: “The strength of the fleets was one of the factors helping states to move into the category of great powers. Moreover, history shows that states not possessing naval forces were unable for a long time to occupy the position of a great power.”⁶⁵

What is clear is that Gorshkov’s work was written primarily for a domestic audience and that he was very aware of the benefits of military strength in nonwar scenarios. However, what is also apparent is that his vision was largely reactive and followed developments in the West. He saw NATO as “an alliance of maritime states, with powerful naval forces occupying advantageous strategic positions in the World Ocean.”⁶⁶ He used strong rhetoric to illustrate the threat he perceived: “For over a century, American imperialism used the navy as the main instrument of its aggressive foreign policy in line with prevailing tradition and was impressed by the concept of sea power which was presented as an irreplaceable means of achieving world dominance.”⁶⁷

The true intention of Western sea power in peacetime, he wrote, was "gun diplomacy."⁶⁸ This assertion was, of course, not necessarily an ill-informed insult. The importance of sea power in "achieving world dominance" was already a generally accepted concept. Gorshkov used the term "local wars of imperialism" to encapsulate his interpretations of Western strategy and offered the view that naval forces were the most suitable instruments for that strategy because of their mobility, persistence, independence, and ability to be deployed or withdrawn at will.⁶⁹ Though Gorshkov used the attributes in his analysis of NATO strategy, they are recognizable, even universal, and equally applicable to his own forces of the time. "Local wars of imperialism" was a politically charged term, but the sense is familiar—it can be equated to that of the "limited wars" or "limited use of naval power" of Cable's *Gunboat Diplomacy*.

However, unlike Cable's, Gorshkov's notion of naval diplomacy was not entirely adversary centered. He was not unaware of its coercive potential, but he saw one role of sea power as that of "holding in check" allies to manage or maintain power relationships.⁷⁰ He was particularly intrigued by the United Kingdom–United States relationship and thought it "interesting" that the United States had achieved its position of relative maritime preeminence through close partnership with Britain, a position that Germany had failed to reach through confrontation.⁷¹ Mahan would have been pleased.

Emphasizing the soft-power potential of naval diplomacy, Gorshkov built up a fleet that not only was a credible fighting force but deployed to nontraditional operating areas with a forthright agenda to extend communist influence:

The Soviet navy is also used in foreign policy measures by our state. But the aims of this use radically differ from those of the imperialist powers. The Soviet navy is an instrument for a peace-loving policy and friendship of the peoples, for a policy of cutting short the aggressive endeavors of imperialism, restraining military adventurism and decisively countering threats to the safety of the peoples from the imperialist powers. . . . Soviet naval seamen . . . feel themselves ambassadors for our country. . . . Friendly visits by Soviet seamen offer the opportunity to the peoples of the countries visited to see for themselves the creativity of socialist principles in our country, the genuine parity of the peoples of the Soviet Union and their high cultural level. In our ships they see the achievements of Soviet science, technology and industry.⁷²

Though the language of the blocs was very different, the understanding and tactics of naval diplomacy during the Cold War were broadly similar in East and West. There are dozens, if not hundreds, of examples of the use of naval diplomacy during the period. Analysis was scant—the writers of the time were busy writing about deterrence and the means to prevent the Cold War becoming "hot." Nonetheless, from coercion to reassurance to cooperation, the superpower navies were seen to have utility as instruments of state power beyond their primary war-fighting role.

NAVAL DIPLOMACY IN THE POST–COLD WAR WORLD

The period since 1990 has been one of transformation and uncertainty in geopolitics. The collapse of the Warsaw Pact and dissolution of the USSR were arguably the principal catalysts for change, but there were other milestones, in social, political, economic, and cultural spheres. The inexorable rise of China and India, the financial crises in the West, the normalization of liberal intervention and subsequent backlash of nationalist movements, insurgency, and anti-Western terrorism have all played their part, as has the ever-ramifying web of commercial interactions, linkages, and interdependencies known as globalization.⁷³

In a “postmodern” era that has been characterized variously as the “end of history” and the “clash of civilizations” there has been no shortage of comment and conjecture;⁷⁴ indeed, it could be argued that grand-strategic reevaluation is the norm following each great transformation of global politics. The First World War, for instance, marked a shift from balance-of-power politics to the pursuit of collective security through international systems for peace, such as the League of Nations.⁷⁵ Similarly, at the end of the Second World War Sir William Beveridge discussed the place of armed force, in his *The Price of Peace*. Three general principles, he argued, should govern force: it must never be used for national purposes, the rights of each nation must not depend on whether it is armed or the scale of its armaments, and yet there must be sufficient arms in the world to enforce the rule of law and keep wrongdoers in order.⁷⁶ Such words may seem naïve today, and they certainly did not predict the reality of the coming Cold War, but the context of the time in which they were written was marked by a very different perception, one based on optimistic expectation and shaped by what had gone before. In the same way, the plethora of immediate post–Cold War writing may not appear quite so insightful in the decades to come.

If Cold War naval diplomacy was understood by practitioners and commentators as a means to maintain bipolar balance through coercion, reassurance, and image management, its post–Cold War expression was not quite so definitive. The new era was a period of change, and for a time in the 1990s one of the major blocs, the former Soviet Union—that is, its remnant the Russian Federation—all but ceased naval activity on grounds of affordability, while the other sailed the world’s oceans unopposed.⁷⁷ The change in global politics inevitably took time to unpick, and as the remaining established navies continued to conduct “business as usual” their professional leaderships and academia debated their collective place in the new world order.⁷⁸ In a reinvestigation of coercive diplomacy, Peter Viggo Jakobson concluded that in general terms the theory stood but that it needed refinement, particularly in acknowledging the use of “carrots” as well as “sticks.”⁷⁹ Some commentators were quick to go farther. Michael Pugh, for instance, stated that “navies are no longer accurate measures of national power”

and that "power, even symbolically, can no longer be solely equated with the barrel of a gunboat."⁸⁰

The U.S. Naval War College has published a series of monographs looking specifically at American naval strategy through the transitional periods of the 1970s, '80s, and '90s.⁸¹ The latter decade stands out because of the scale and pace of development in strategic thought.⁸² Throughout, naval diplomacy was an acknowledged feature of American strategy and was much discussed, though often under the banner of "forward presence":

Forward-deployed naval forces help preserve U.S. influence overseas, even in places where we have no bases or political access. They enhance our ability to deter aggression, promote regional stability, strengthen diplomatic relations abroad and respond quickly to crisis. Naval forces provide policy makers with unique flexibility. We can quickly reposition a powerful fighting force off the coast of a country, out of sight to influence subtly or within sight to make a strong statement.⁸³

Forward presence, Robert Wood, then dean of Naval Warfare Studies at the Naval War College, stated in 1993, "is something we need to define in terms of meaning and degree as well as in terms of other names used for it throughout history."⁸⁴

Similar reassessments also took place elsewhere. In the United Kingdom, the Royal Navy in the 1990s formally published its doctrine for the first time, with an acknowledgment of naval diplomacy. Eric Grove, discussing his part in writing the first edition of *British Maritime Doctrine*, stated, "We were not completely satisfied with Sir James Cable's taxonomy of 'gunboat diplomacy' for the purposes of doctrine and instead adopted 'presence,' 'symbolic use,' 'coercion,' and 'preventive, precautionary and pre-emptive naval diplomacy.'"⁸⁵ Indeed, language is key; Canada similarly attempted to distance its doctrine from "gunboat" diplomacy, which it called a "pejorative" term, preferring instead "preventive deployments, coercion, presence and symbolic use."⁸⁶

The argument for naval diplomacy and forward presence appeared compelling with respect to the age of intervention but its value was limited by its focus on the naval forces of the West. Like other aspects of international-relations thought, it suffered from Western-centricity.⁸⁷ In the early days of the aftermath of the Cold War virtually no attention was given to the navies of the rising powers—a shortfall that has since been addressed.

In 2007 the Indian navy deployed a squadron of warships to Singapore, Yokosuka, Qingdao, Vladivostok, Manila, and Ho Chi Minh City. The deployment—a departure from previous Indian operating norms—bore, as the naval theorist Geoffrey Till remarked, "more than a passing resemblance to the famous cruise of Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet before the First World War." The cruise delivered little in terms of specific exercises but was conducted "for general

purposes of greatness.” Specifically, there is undoubted rivalry between India and China in the region, and the deployment was the clear staking of a claim of regional dominance by the Indians.⁸⁸

Whether the Indian deployment was in reality different from the naval activity of the superpowers during the Cold War, representing a return to an older modus operandi, is uncertain. What is evident, however, is that naval diplomacy was alive and well at the turn of the twenty-first century, and not just by the global hegemon. Malcolm Murfett, one of a new generation of commentators beginning to question the significance of naval diplomacy, comes to the same conclusion: “One of the reasons why it still has relevance in the modern world is because it can be used on a wide variety of occasions to achieve certain tangible results.”⁸⁹

China achieved such a “tangible result” when in 2008 it announced the dispatching of two destroyers and a support ship to the Gulf of Aden for counterpiracy operations. The deployment, though small by Western standards, demonstrated the ability of China’s navy to operate credibly and sustain a force at a distance and for a period that had previously been assumed to be beyond its capability. The People’s Liberation Army Navy “compelled Western observers to revise their once-mocking estimate of Chinese aptitude for naval expeditionary operations.”⁹⁰ Once again we hear mention of the outward character of a rising power. When Western analysts, notably in the China Maritime Studies Institute at the U.S. Naval War College, turned their attention to the East they found there had been in China a surge of interest in maritime affairs and in the theories of Mahan—interest that, viewed in concert with Indian and other Asian maritime expansion programs, pointed to a prospect of a “reconfiguration of maritime power” in the region and, by extension, globally.⁹¹

The literature shows that naval diplomacy has been used since man first put to sea in ships and that its history can be traced down through the years ever since. However, until the middle of the twentieth century, strategic naval writing tended to focus on *military* capability at sea, even though the political benefits of the threat of force, the use of limited force, and “showing the flag” were well known and implicitly understood. Naval diplomacy before the Second World War was primarily studied by those maritime states with global ambitions, who practiced it to coerce, reassure, and promote their own images. The bipolarity of the Cold War did little to change the purpose and tactics of naval diplomacy, but its use, for the most part, became ever more limited to the major seafaring states in the Western and Eastern blocs. Strategic thought in that period was anchored by superpower confrontation, but interest in naval diplomacy as a separate topic grew, particularly in the 1970s. The aftermath of the Cold War saw a transformation in world politics and a reassessment of the utility of force in general. Naval

diplomacy continued; indeed, its use expanded with the increase in the number of maritime stakeholders. If we look to the future we may start to see new aspects of an old role; ballistic-missile defense at sea, theater security cooperation, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, enforcement of no-fly zones, forward presence, and global fleet stations are all forms of postmodern naval diplomacy. As the strategies of the sea powers still testify, there is always advantage to be had from a “decided preponderance at sea.”

NOTES

1. Ken Booth suggests a “trinity” of naval roles—military, policing, and diplomatic. This model has since been adopted by numerous Western navies and incorporated into doctrine. Ken Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p. 15.
2. Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1890; repr. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1987), p. 22.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
5. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin Classics, 1954), pp. 36–76.
6. Alfred T. Mahan, *Retrospect and Prospect: Studies in International Relations, Naval and Political* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1902), pp. 32–33.
7. The eight-nation alliance comprised Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Russia, and the United States. See T. D. P. Dugdale-Pointon, “The Boxer Rebellion, 1900,” *Military History Encyclopedia on the Web*, 19 September 2004, www.historyofwar.org/.
8. Alfred T. Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power Present and Future* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1897), p. 117.
9. Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, pp. 52–54.
10. Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), p. 5.
11. Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), p. 40.
12. Mahan, *Retrospect and Prospect*, p. 58.
13. Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, p. 82.
14. Barry Gough, “Maritime Strategy: The Legacies of Mahan and Corbett as Philosophers of Sea Power,” *RUSI Journal* 133, no. 4 (1988), p. 56.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
16. Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (London: Longmans, Green, 1911; repr. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2004), p. 13.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 39–48.
18. For “encouraged,” *ibid.*, p. 68.
19. “Demonstration” is defined as “an attack or show of force on a front where a decision is not sought, made with the aim of deceiving the enemy.” *Glossary of Terms and Definitions* (Brussels: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2010), p. 2-D-5. See also United Kingdom, Royal Navy, *The United Kingdom Approach to Amphibious Operations* (Portsmouth, U.K.: Maritime Warfare Centre, 1997), p. 33.
20. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, p. 66.
21. Andrew Lambert, “Preface to Gregg Revivals Edition,” in *National Policy and Naval Strength and Other Essays*, by Sir H. W. Richmond (London: Longmans, Green, 1928; repr. Aldershot, U.K.: Gregg Revivals, 1993), p. xviii.
22. Sir H. W. Richmond, *Sea Power in the Modern World* (London: Bell & Sons, 1934), p. 17.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
24. For “different terms,” *ibid.*, pp. 193–94.
25. Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political*

- Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 32–39.
26. Jeremy Black, *Naval Power: A History of Warfare and the Sea from 1500* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 2009), p. 118.
 27. See, for example, Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1968); and Peter Padfield, *Maritime Dominion and the Triumph of the Free World* (London: John Murray, 2009), p. 48.
 28. Peter Hore, *The Habit of Victory: The Story of the Royal Navy 1545–1945* (London: Pan Books, 2006), p. 243.
 29. V. R. Berghahn, *Germany and the Approach of War in 1914*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1993), p. 56.
 30. David G. Herrmann, *The Arming of Europe and the Making of the First World War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1996), p. 38.
 31. See, for example, Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany and the Coming of the Great War* (London: Pimlico, 1991), pp. 609–25.
 32. Henry J. Hendrix, *Theodore Roosevelt's Naval Diplomacy: The U.S. Navy and the Birth of the American Century* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2009), pp. 54–81 (for Colombia), pp. 82–103 (for Tangier).
 33. For an account of the Great White Fleet, see, for example, Kenneth Wimmel, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Great White Fleet: American Sea Power Comes of Age* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1998).
 34. James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy, 1919–1991*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1994), p. 14.
 35. James Cable, *Diplomacy at Sea* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1985), p. 3.
 36. The “realist” school in international relations makes the self-interest of states the primary factor in global power politics. See Nye, *Future of Power*, p. 19.
 37. Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy*, p. 17.
 38. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.
 39. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.
 40. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
 41. *Ibid.*
 42. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
 43. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
 44. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
 45. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
 46. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
 47. Richard Hill, “Naval Thinking in the Nuclear Age,” in *The Development of British Naval Thinking*, ed. Geoffrey Till (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 167.
 48. Edward N. Luttwak, *The Political Uses of Sea Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974), p. 3.
 49. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
 50. *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.
 51. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
 52. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
 53. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
 54. Malcolm Murfett, “Gunboat Diplomacy: Outmoded or Back in Vogue?,” in *The Changing Face of Maritime Power*, ed. Andrew Dorman, Mike Lawrence Smith, and Matthew R. H. Uttley (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1999), p. 82.
 55. Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, p. 45.
 56. For a useful précis of doctrinal development, see Aaron P. Jackson, *Keystone Doctrine Development in Five Commonwealth Countries: A Comparative Perspective*, Papers in Australian Maritime Affairs 33 (Canberra: Sea Power Centre, 2010).
 57. Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, p. 16.
 58. *Ibid.*, pp. 18–20.
 59. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–35.
 60. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
 61. John Hibbits, “Admiral Gorshkov’s Writings: Twenty Years of Naval Thought,” in *Naval Power in Soviet Policy*, ed. Paul Murphy (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Air Force, 1978), p. 1.
 62. Donald Chipman, “Admiral Gorshkov and the Soviet Navy,” *Air University Review* 33, no. 5 (July–August 1982), p. 35.
 63. Sergey Gorshkov, *The Sea Power of the State* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1979), pp. 178–212.

64. Quoted in Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2009), p. 254.
65. Gorshkov, *Sea Power of the State*, p. 59.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
72. *Ibid.*, pp. 251–52.
73. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, *Globalization of World Politics*, 4th ed. (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), p. 8.
74. Among the most influential texts of the post-Cold War era are Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992), and Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993), pp. 22–49.
75. Joseph S. Nye, *Understanding International Conflicts*, 6th ed. (Harlow, U.K.: Pearson Longman, 2007), pp. 59–113.
76. Sir William Beveridge, *The Price of Peace* (London: Pilot, 1945), pp. 53–55.
77. John B. Hattendorf, ed., *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1990s: Selected Documents*, Newport Paper 27 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, September 2006), p. 1.
78. Thomas Otte reminds us that intervention "has been and probably remains a well-established feature of international affairs and instrument of statecraft." Thomas G. Otte, "On Intervention: Some Introductory Remarks," in *Military Intervention: From Gunboat Diplomacy to Humanitarian Intervention*, Andrew M. Dorman and Thomas G. Otte (Aldershot, U.K.: Dartmouth, 1995), p. 4.
79. Peter Viggo Jakobson, "The Strategy of Coercive Diplomacy: Refining Existing Theory to Post-Cold War Realities," in *Strategic Coercion: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Lawrence Freedman (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), p. 84.
80. Michael Pugh, "Is Mahan Still Alive? State Naval Power in the International System," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 16, no. 2 (Fall 1996), p. 111.
81. The series comprised four numbers of the Newport Papers monographs, published in Newport, Rhode Island, by the Naval War College Press: John B. Hattendorf, *The Evolution of the U.S. Navy's Maritime Strategy, 1977–1986*, Newport Paper 19 (2004); Hattendorf, ed., *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1990s*, Newport Paper 27, cited above; Hattendorf, ed., *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1970s: Selected Documents*, Newport Paper 30 (September 2007); and Hattendorf and Peter M. Swartz, eds., *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1980s: Selected Documents*, Newport Paper 33 (December 2008).
82. During the first ten years after the end of the Cold War the U.S. Navy subjected itself to almost continuous reassessment. Its outlook and vision were published successively in "The Way Ahead" (1991), *The Naval Policy Book* (1992), ". . . From the Sea: Preparing the Naval Service for the 21st Century" (1992), *Naval Warfare* (1994), "Forward . . . From the Sea" (1994), "The Navy Operational Concept" (1997), "Anytime, Anywhere: A Navy for the 21st Century" (1997), and "Navy Strategic Planning Guidance with Long Range Planning Guidance" (2000). For a précis and critical evaluation of each see Hattendorf, ed., *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1990s*.
83. Hattendorf, ed., *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1990s*, p. 70.
84. Robert Wood, "Opening Remarks," in *Mahan Is Not Enough*, ed. James Goldrick and John B. Hattendorf (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1993), p. 4.
85. Eric Grove, "The Discovery of Doctrine," in *Development of British Naval Thinking*, ed. Till, p. 187.
86. Canadian Forces, *Leadmark: The Navy's Strategy for 2020* (Ottawa: National Defence Headquarters, 2001), pp. 36, 173.
87. Paul Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), p. 149.
88. Till, *Seapower*, p. 343.
89. Murfett, "Gunboat Diplomacy," pp. 85–86.
90. Toshi Yoshihara and James Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2010), p. 149.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 14.