

# Is Mahan Still Alive? State Naval Power in the International System

Michael Pugh

Volume 16, Number 2, Fall 1996

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs16\\_02art07](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs16_02art07)

[See table of contents](#)

---

## Publisher(s)

The University of New Brunswick

## ISSN

1198-8614 (print)

1715-5673 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

## Cite this review

Pugh, M. (1996). Review of [Is Mahan Still Alive? State Naval Power in the International System]. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 16(2), 109–124.

# Is Mahan Still Alive? State Naval Power in the International System

by *Michael Pugh*

*Michael Pugh* is Senior Lecturer in International Relations, Department of Politics, University of Plymouth, UK.

Any system of better cooperation to maximise collective security is likely to mean that we have to accept the constraint of accepting some alteration to the value we have previously put upon 'national' security.

Peter Nailor

## INTRODUCTION

The text which illustrates the theme of this article is taken from some predictions made by the late Professor Peter Nailor of the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, over twenty years ago.<sup>1</sup> Nailor's comment on maximizing collective security during the Cold War, placed a question mark over the organic relationship between naval power and the state, a relationship that the nineteenth-century American naval theorist, Rear-Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914), had done so much to promote.<sup>2</sup> Although the specialist community of maritime historians rightly consider Mahan's concepts of sea power to be trapped in a narrow historical period, his doctrine that without sea power a nation cannot be a power in the world continues to be extremely influential among practitioners and strategists. For strategists, his doctrine, suitably modified to incorporate the management of sea/land power relations, remains a cardinal component of geostrategic politics.<sup>3</sup> However, the Mahanist view of navies as key measures and instruments of national power is increasingly suspect in the modern interdependent world even in the absence of the international collective security system alluded to by Nailor.

Of course, perceptions of the national interest continue to determine naval doctrine, but in the Western world even a realist and neo-realist conception of international relations would recognize that in the 1990s sea power is no longer a wholly adequate measure of a state's international significance. There are alternative and more manipulative sources of influence, beyond state control, which have grown in relative importance, such as control over financial markets, and over electronic information and communications. Moreover, in the West it is increasingly problematic for navies to act as purely national instruments because it is increasingly difficult to define national interests without reference to the international context. Of course, national policies have generally taken account of international conditions in the past. Alliance designs for war-fighting, for example, have obviously shaped the national policies of individual NATO members. But an autonomous, national approach to sea power policy may be increasingly difficult to sustain as processes in the international system affect national sovereignty. Naval power is not immune from these processes.

This article ignores many aspects of Mahan's theorizing (the quest for Jominian principles of naval warfare, support for overseas possessions, the priority of sea power

over land power, relative naval autonomy within defence establishments, the emphasis on building battle fleets, and on a strategy of deterring or destroying enemy fleets). It focuses rather on the central Mahanist concern with naval-maritime power as a national attribute in the international system, having symbolic as well as instrumental significance. Challenges to the national security concept from a Western perspective are then examined and exemplified with reference to the protection of ocean trade and fisheries. The growth of sea power in the Asia-Pacific is then contrasted with the pressures on Mahanism in the West. On balance, however, the emergence of new naval powers does not justify abandoning a cooperative theory of sea power as a sequel to Mahanism.

## **MAHANIST STATE CENTRISM**

Henry L. Stimson once remarked of the US Navy that it frequently seemed to "retire from the realm of logic into a dim religious world in which Neptune was God, Mahan his prophet, and the United States Navy the only true church."<sup>4</sup> But it is not necessary to be part of that "dim religious world" to accept Mahan's view of naval power as a key instrument of state security policy in the international system. There has been a popular credo which says that navies secure national interests in the international system and that privileged access to maritime trade and overseas markets, safeguarded by a national navy, produces greatness and power. Mahan's view continues to have enormous appeal, especially for hegemonic powers and states engaged in nation building.

Traditionally, this concept of navies as a measure of hierarchy and as instruments of state competition has taken precedence over ideas of international cooperation. Maritime development has thus been closely linked to theories of dominance in world history. Access to the sea, the control of trade routes and the development of port hinterlands have been regarded as keys to the rise and fall of states and empires, most recently in the writings of Robert Gilpin, George Modelski and William Thompson.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, too, there has been a huge body of literature on the nuances of coercive naval diplomacy, crisis management, presence, poise and showing the flag mostly from a state centric perspective.<sup>6</sup> Navies have commonly been regarded as instruments of national power and prestige *par excellence*.<sup>7</sup> In practice, too, even though multilateral cooperation has flourished to an unprecedented extent, there were some problems in integrating the various national navies. It took almost twenty years from the creation of NATO to the establishment of an integrated standing force (Standing Naval Force Atlantic in 1968), and although this in turn did much to foster common operations it took a little time for its full effectiveness to be developed.<sup>8</sup>

## **SYMBOLS AND INSTRUMENTS OF POWER**

Military power, like historical sites and trappings of authority, serves symbolic functions, reinforcing and ratifying belief systems which sustain the nation. As Thomas Franck argues, authoritative images "are used to validate and formalize power" because matters are taken seriously when they have lineage, pedigree and tradition.<sup>9</sup> Large warships and powerful submarines fulfil the requirement for symbols of majesty and awe. As John Pay

has shown, maintaining a large US carrier force with sufficient and suitable aircraft in peacetime (i.e., the absence of a war between major powers), will depend upon several factors, but their symbolic importance in defining how the United States sees its role in the world cannot be denied.<sup>10</sup>

However, the symbols have to be associated with some kind of reality if cognitive dissonance is not to create delusions of grandeur that outreach the ability to finance them. Navies are no longer accurate measures of national power, and may not be accurate measures of *maritime* power. Indeed, there is something of a disjunction between maritime and naval power. For reasons discussed below, in a sense the big maritime "powers" in the world are the Liberian and Panamanian registry companies. States such as Norway, Greece and Sweden have not needed massive naval power to sustain their maritime interests. In part this may have been because they could trade under an umbrella held up by friendly navies. In part, however, they have been able also to rely on the emergence of a maritime regime, which provides a framework for normative behavior.

The value of navies for fighting wars cannot be denied, though Mahanists may have exaggerated the importance of battles at sea.<sup>11</sup> But are they so important in the post-Cold War era of intra-state conflicts and the requirement among external interventionists for "casualty-free wars?" Navies were indispensable in creating and sustaining overseas empires, but imperialism (in the colonial and territorial senses), is no longer a goal of most ambitious leaders. Indeed, navies are a casualty of "imperial overstretch," the contradiction between gain from physical military control and the costs of effecting it.<sup>12</sup> The concept of security has also broadened to encompass non-military issues such as the environment and human rights, in which military forces have limited roles. In short, power, even symbolically, can no longer be solely equated with the barrel of a gunboat.

## **THE NATIONAL SECURITY CONCEPT CHALLENGED**

Threats to the formula that navies are expressions of national power also come from another direction. As the nature of state sovereignty itself changes, so must the Mahanist view that navies are simply instruments of state security. Indeed, in a political sense navies have enormous potential to *exceed* the requirements of national interest, and to some extent, traditionally they have done so. The major navies operated a kind of benevolent hegemony in fulfilling international good order functions suppressing slavery or piracy and keeping straits open though usually with hidden national agendas, such as protecting markets.

The foundation of political theory has been the concept of state sovereignty the state's accountability, its representativeness, its monopoly of power and authority over people and the autonomous direction of its own fate. This foundation has been increasingly challenged on several grounds.

- The Hobbesian view of the state as having a single will, purpose and judgement has been criticized as failing to acknowledge that state policy is the subject of bureaucratic rivalry and paralyzing contention.<sup>13</sup>

- In capitalist economies, market forces have almost come to dominate the state, with the consequence that in many Western societies the state has reduced its assets and areas of responsibility in favor of entrepreneurship and commercial relations. Further, many clashes in which the state becomes involved are really sectoral commercial clashes: French air traffic controllers versus British tour firms; Galician, Canadian, Breton and Cornish fishermen against each other.
- State autonomy is also challenged by competing institutions: from above by international and regional regulatory bodies, such as the International Maritime Organisation and the European Union; from below by substate nationalism and community entities. Indeed, there may be a connection between the two divergent trends of globalization and a "virtual epidemic" of micro-nationalism.<sup>14</sup> As states have lost control to transnational and global influences, communities regard states as less relevant to their needs.
- Finally, it has long been recognized that state autonomy has been limited by external influences and globalization processes, especially the diffusion of capitalism and the spread of communications. Demographic, economic, technological and environmental challenges are all transnational. Increasingly, too, concepts of humanitarianism and environmentalism are transnational concerns.

Remarking on these factors, David Held, argues that there is a quantum change both in the scope and intensity of global dynamics. States lack the capacity to insist on exclusive influence within their borders. At the same time, collaboration has become essential to survive and to influence global outcomes, as reflected in the growth of international regimes and institutions. In short, states have seen autonomy curtailed but the stage for their activity expand, their boundaries both stretched and penetrated. Consequently, "the meaning of national democratic decision-making today has to be explored in the context of a complex multinational, multilogic international society, and a huge range of actual and nascent regional and global institutions which transcend and mediate national boundaries."<sup>15</sup>

Under such circumstances, holding on to state autonomy and defining the substance of state security becomes a taxing business. Some observers assert that clear definitions of national interests are no longer possible, and hegemony difficult to exert because state sovereignty is collapsing, assailed by global processes and the impacts of non-state actors.<sup>16</sup>

This is not to say that the idea of national security is redundant. Perceptions of national security interests are a starting point for decision-making. The United States was more interested in invading Haiti than East Timor. But in an international system of complex interdependence and without a definitive enemy it is not easy to detect and define direct threats to national security.

What seems to have happened is that Western states have responded, sometimes reluctantly, to the demands of "cooperative security." This evolved *without* clear national interest being at stake or direct threats to national security as external involvement in

Cambodia, Somalia, the Adriatic and Rwanda demonstrates. True, a strong swing away from such multilateral involvements developed in the United States after the mid-term Congressional elections in 1994. The Clinton administration's apparent retreat into semi-detachment from multilateralism, pressured by Republican representatives, is a reaction to the absence of clear-cut military solutions, particularly in Somalia where the US military culture was bruised by a "Vietnam in miniature."<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, for both political and military reasons the United States may still be wary about undertaking expeditionary warfare without trying to build a coalition. However cosmetic its multilateral offshore component, the invasion of Haiti suggests that the United States will seek coincidence of national and international interests and international legitimacy in preference to "going it alone." In fact, a policy of multinational consultation in formulating naval doctrine has been implemented, with early indications that war-fighting doctrine will give less emphasis to sea control and more to multinational force projection ashore. US politicians may appear to be retreating from cooperative security in circumstances legitimized by the UN and heading toward a Mahanist emphasis on national interests, but US naval doctrine seems set on a "joint and combined" track: "joint" with other military branches, "combined" with other navies.<sup>18</sup>

Elsewhere, especially in Europe, policy and doctrine is being reformulated to emphasize security roles that impinge only obliquely on the security of the individual state.<sup>19</sup> This is bound to affect the organic relationship between navies and old concepts of national interest. At one level the old Mahanist equation remains fairly simple: the purpose of navies is to defend national security. And there is little problem in producing an abstract definition of national security: "as protection of national territories, dependencies and persons and their social, economic and environmental well-being." However, it may be an increasingly difficult task for states to give actual substance to that goal of protecting their integrity.

In his examination of the strategic implications for navies of the end of the Cold War, Geoffrey Till indicates that the most likely, and appropriate, response by planners is to engage in "parametric planning," avoiding threat-specific strategies and maintaining balanced and highly versatile forces in order to provide cover against a spectrum of contingencies.<sup>20</sup> This is a useful approach because, realistically, naval establishments can hardly afford protection against *all* potential threats. The alternative to providing a costly "all risk" policy is to take out general insurance, and to underwrite the cover with other insurers. The current problem for many states, however, is to clarify the nature of the spectrum of most likely risks. The main certainty seems to be that in the post-Cold War era it is now difficult to define interstate threats, at least in Western Europe. By the same token, however, the difficulty in identifying potential threats that single out particular navies makes "spreading the risks" in the form of cooperative security more attractive. Singularization only seems likely for lower-level contingencies such as disruption to shipping, terrorism, pollution emergencies and fishing disputes.

Yet even at the low intensity end of the spectrum the problems may be diffuse, the contingencies unlikely to be purely national and support for international regime building

an appealing and viable political goal. This can be illustrated by reference to ocean trade and the protection of fisheries.

## SUPRANATIONAL MERCANTILISM

Mercantilism was a prominent feature of Mahanist strategic thinking. The well-being of states depended on trade which, ultimately, had to be safeguarded by naval power. However, it is only a slight exaggeration to say that one of the great paradoxes of global maritime trade today is that none of the flag of convenience states has a navy, and none of the traditional naval powers has a merchant fleet. The mischievous might want to ask whether this is merely coincidence. However, the protection of merchant ships in a crisis is an interesting illustration of Nailor's point about constraints on the value of "national" security.

Since the break-up of the old nation-based shipping cartels, maritime trade has become a truly global, non-national business. Since the 1970s, de-regulation has further de-nationalized mercantile marines. To take the UK as an all-too-typical case, only 18 percent of UK's seaborne trade is carried in UK vessels, and the UK register records only about 300 ships of more than 500 gross tons. The volume of shipping controlled by the UK and dependencies (Isle of Man, Channel Islands, Bermuda, Hong Kong and others) as measured by share of the world's tonnage is less than 2 percent, down from about 9 percent in 1975. By contrast, in 1994 the phoney maritime powers, Liberia and Panama, were the largest contributors to the International Maritime Organisation's funds (together accounting for 22 percent of its total budget).<sup>21</sup> The Liberian register operates out of New York, a convenient arrangement when Liberia dissolved into civil war in 1990 and became a "failed state." The register continues to operate for the convenience of ship owners and traders who want to cut labor costs. However, this system is not so convenient when ill-trained crews and substandard "coffin ships" increase the likelihood of accidents.<sup>22</sup> Nor is it convenient when convenience-registered ships come under attack and require protection.

Most hand-wringing over the decline of national shipping in the maritime community has focused on its implications for available shipping and manpower in emergencies. But merchant ships are potential *demandeurs* as well as *fournisseurs*. Who defends them in a crisis? There are no blue-water Liberian or Panamanian navies.

True, in a crisis merchant shipping owners can reflag in a trice to get the protection of a naval power. Many owners rushed to register under a Red Ensign flag during the "Tanker War" in the Gulf in 1987-88. But in this situation the national interests being protected by the Royal Navy were international good order functions. A frigate could find itself safeguarding a non-national ship, a non-national crew, a non-national cargo and expenditures in non-national ports. In fact the commercial operations of a protected merchant ship may even have been undermining the national economy the proceeds may be going to Norwegian owners, a Greek certification agency, Japanese manufacturers and a Filipino crew. In terms of direct national interest all that a frigate may be "protecting" is the fee for transferring to the UK register. That fee might be more logically extracted



directly by the navy concerned through protection money. Opposition to the re-flagging of ships in order to qualify for a free protection service has been opposed by seafarers on the grounds that protecting "scab owners" is a misuse of national resources.<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, protection of trade and freedom of the seas *is* a vital interest, even if the trade is non-national. However, it is not merely a national interest but a multinational one which, quite sensibly, has led to the continued pooling of available resources, both merchant and military, during the Tanker War and the Gulf War, for example. The issue has been significant in the 1990s in relation to so-called pirate attacks (actually the majority in territorial waters) affecting South East Asia. The safety of shipping had become a sufficiently serious problem that the idea of an external multinational intervention was raised in the press, though not given credence by governments.<sup>24</sup> The problem of protecting trade nevertheless illustrates the difficulties with the concept of autonomous naval power. Even the apparent hardening of maritime territorial jurisdiction and the creation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) does not necessarily represent the resurrection of Mahanism, and this can be illustrated with regard to fishing resources.

## **FISHING RESOURCES**

Autonomy is constrained on the issue of marine resources, though governments are often lobbied by private groups to protect their sectional interests in exploitation of the sea. Fishing disputes present a graphic illustration of the tension between national (and pressure group) interests and the perceived requirements of predictability in an international regime. Fisheries protection has been an ancient role for naval forces (or their coast guard and maritime police successors) to support the civil economy.<sup>25</sup> As fish stocks decline, competition has become fiercer, and the need for naval/coast guard protection greater.

An equally significant approach, however, has been to turn to multilateral regime-building. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which came into force on 16 November 1994, and the later adoption by the General Assembly of the Implementation Agreement on Part XI (Deep Sea-bed Mining), may represent creeping jurisdiction, but it does not underpin unilateralism. True, the regime protects the rights of coastal states, but it is a regime that operates effectively because there is general recognition of the mutuality of its provisions. For all its flaws and loopholes, notably on straddling fish stocks, UNCLOS strengthens the international maritime regime by codifying existing law and buttressing the quest for normative behavior to prevent disputes getting out of hand.

Moreover, apart from the issue of whaling, which is dealt with separately, the UNCLOS clauses on fishing protects coastal state sovereignty for exploitation in the EEZ, but with the caveat that attempts are made to maintain the ecosystem, manage stocks and ensure compliance with its regulations on the part of foreign-registered boats. States have perhaps been more energetic in prosecuting non-national fishers than in conserving stocks. But the dispute between Canada and the European Union (EU) in March-April



1995 indicates the limits to autonomy in the exploitation and forcible protection of resources at sea.

Canada and the EU are parties to an additional regulatory body, the 1978 North-west Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (NAFO) and its Standing Committee on International Control. The NAFO area is one of the most intensively policed in the world. In 1994, EU boats were inspected on average almost every two weeks. However, Canada challenged international law on 3 March 1995 by extending its Fisheries Protection Act to permit the arrest of Iberian vessels catching Greenland halibut in the high seas outside 200 mile zone. A naval vessel arrested a Spanish boat a week later. Whatever the merits of the dispute in this particular case and between Canada and the EU in general, negotiations actually led to a strengthening, at least in principle, of NAFO inspection and control provisions. The EU also obtained an undertaking that Canada would repeal its legislation.<sup>26</sup> It became apparent that a state cannot expect to strengthen one regime (on the exploitation of fish stocks) at the expense of another (the Geneva High Seas Convention and customary international law). Indeed, the prospect of anarchy on the high seas would not have suited any of the parties. Furthermore, the incident gave added point to the multilateral efforts to secure a straddling stocks regime.

The UN Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks, convened in 1993, recognized that conservation and management within EEZs is affected by what happens outside the 200 nm zone, and that a holistic and integrated approach to fisheries management is necessary. A draft Straddling Stocks Convention was accepted by nearly 100 states in August 1995, and was opened for signature on 4 December 1995. It requires 30 signatures for ratification and could enter into force during 1996. It was accepted as inevitable by the EU fisheries commissioner and welcomed by some key states including Canada, the UK, Norway, Chile and Japan.

In bitterly contested enforcement provisions (Articles 21-22), the agreement stipulates that all vessels must be subject to boarding and inspection outside EEZs by accredited inspectors of states within regional fishing organizations. In cases of serious violation where the flag state takes no action, the boat can be diverted "without delay to the nearest appropriate port." The boarding parties should "avoid the use of force," although if they do use it "the degree should not exceed that reasonably required in the circumstances."<sup>27</sup> The imprecision on this aspect is far from satisfactory, and whether a management approach to the high seas as part of the common heritage is unilaterally or multilaterally enforced is a crucial political, legal and practical issue. A unilateral approach might be cost-effective because the coastal state would have an incentive to ensure compliance and its navy may have a comparative advantage in terms of accessibility to fisheries. On the other hand, regional or joint arrangements by parties with interests would contain the risks of extending national jurisdiction to the high seas, might appeal to small states without the means to undertake unilateral enforcement and might diminish the potential for disputes since an element of cooperative behavior is invoked. The text emphasizes multinationalism and allows in Article 20 for regional agreements to include procedures for the authorities of single states to act on behalf of the collectivity and board and

inspect, arrest and detain fishing vessels flying non-national flags a procedure adopted by the South Pacific Forum Fisheries Agreement.<sup>28</sup>

In general, then, one can expect that unilateral action will be constrained by the regimes within which states seek legitimacy for their actions. There seems little doubt that at a functional level states allow their interests to be negotiated in the interests of external harmony or through a sense of obligation.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the maritime domain has always had peculiarities in terms of contending sovereignties and interests. Over the high seas, the principle of *mare liberum* pertains in spite of the Convention on Straddling Stocks. Even within territorial seas, foreign states claim explicit rights of transit and have risked conflict to assert those rights, notably the Royal Navy's celebrated claim to transit the Corfu Channel as an international strait in 1946. In sum, decisions on a multilateral basis may appeal to states that seek political influence, or protection from security threats, through an international regime which promises to make the behavior of other states more predictable. State policies thereby become "institutionalized" or embedded by the multinational context, blurring the distinctions between national and international interests.

To a large extent this is acknowledged in Western states and in some regions, such as the South Atlantic and South Pacific, where new levels of functional or security cooperation at sea have occurred.<sup>30</sup> For example, in March 1995 the Netherlands and Belgium agreed to set up a twin command center to control their surface combatants, and the navies of France, Spain, Italy and Portugal have joined in the EUROMARFOR (European Maritime Force).<sup>31</sup> The Royal Navy has also moved along this path. Presenting his vision of the Royal Navy's future, the First Sea Lord effectively endorsed Mahan's eclipse. In general he did not expect the Royal Navy to be acting alone:

Except in the case of inalienable national responsibilities, we should look first towards partnership and alliance . . . the complex interactions of our membership of NATO, EU, WEU, OSCE and the UN . . . The Royal Navy has an unbroken 400 year tradition of being a strategically decisive instrument of national policy . . . We now stand on the threshold of a quite different role: a shift from the tradition of strategic enablement to a focus at the operational level of war. By this I mean operations which are conducted typically within a single theatre, under unified command and which are inherently joint, *and probably combined*, in nature.<sup>32</sup> [italics added]

However, policies of rational cooperation, together with misgivings about military solutions to problems are, as Ken Booth points out, generally Western phenomena.<sup>33</sup> What is the consequence when some states in Asia for example regard Mahanism as relevant for prestige, nation-building and the furtherance of purely national values?

## **MAHAN LIVES!**

Whilst the East-West naval arms race was at its peak, many developing states transformed their maritime assets "into key dimensions of domestic and foreign policy."<sup>34</sup> In contrast to trends in the West, the idea that naval power is essential for self-reliance, to

promote ambition and deter others was mirrored in naval growth in Asia particularly. Within the context of general increased arms expenditure, the growth in coastal and minor combatants has been spectacular, and submarines and major combatants, including helicopter-carrying frigates, are also being acquired by several states.<sup>35</sup> Regional threat perceptions, archipelagic and EEZ responsibilities and, in some cases, distrust of Western intrusion have all played a part in this. In short, Mahan seems to be alive and well and living in Asia.

Maritime security is a major preoccupation in the Asia-Pacific region. The sea is an important source of food and other resources, and for many states seaborne trade through strategic straits and waterways has underpinned economic growth.<sup>36</sup> However, the region is politically fractured. In Northeast Asia there are limited experiences of interoperability and maritime cooperation is inhibited by widespread suspicions of the intentions *inter alia* of China, Japan and North Korea, in spite of diplomatic rapprochements between dyads such as China and South Korea in 1991. There remain numerous disputes over sovereignty and maritime delimitations, not least in the islands of the China Seas and between China and Taiwan, though there have also been less well-publicized efforts at joint exploitation of resources.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps the most difficult issue to assess is the future maritime role of China's navy, whose Commander-in-Chief from 1982-88, Admiral Liu Huaqing, has been described as a modern Mahan and the Chinese equivalent of Admiral Sergei Gorshkov.<sup>38</sup> The Chinese Navy, with 59 major warships (destroyers and frigates) and more than 100 submarines, and its extensive influence, through the supply of naval equipment to India's neighbors for example, has become more active in developing a blue water role. An assertive maritime regional policy is underway, and a limited war with Vietnam or the Philippines over the Spratlys a strong possibility.

Nevertheless, this pervasive Mahanist spirit will not necessarily signify challenges to the traditional naval powers. First, many of the expanding naval powers, in ASEAN for example, continue to have good political relations with the traditional Western naval powers. Second, it is difficult to determine whether Asian naval building represents substantial expansion or merely incremental modernization; it is probably a bit of both. It may be a cause for concern but it does not as yet represent a structured arms race. Third, grandiose ambitions to acquire ships and submarines, even second-hand or off-the-shelf, is often driven by prestige but tempered by the requirement for large-scale investment in shore facilities, infrastructure and personnel training. As India has found, it may not be feasible for developing states to sustain a Mahanist momentum.<sup>39</sup>

In sum, interpretations of naval expansion in the Asia-Pacific as a threat may be exaggerated, though there is certainly potential for regional naval competition.<sup>40</sup> The most appropriate responses of the post-Mahan powers may be to encourage political structures which establish norms of behavior and extend the maritime regime to increase confidence-building and predictability. This is far more difficult in Asia than in Europe, not least because Asian states have been wary of efforts by Canada, Australia and others, to encourage security integration. But some development has occurred, notably in

ASEAN and its dialogue partners, including the United States, Russia, China and Japan. The Asia Regional Forum, launched in 1993, proposed to examine non-offensive defence, arms proliferation, nuclear issues and common security.<sup>41</sup> Although institutionalized naval cooperation for collective security is probably some way off, there may be progress in developing functional "low level" activity that will build confidence, such as common procedures to handle safety at sea, incidents at sea agreements and cooperation in maritime surveillance.<sup>42</sup> Various fora for maritime discussions exist at both an official and "second track" level, such as the Western Pacific Naval Symposium and the Maritime Cooperation Working Group of the Conference on Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region (CSCAP).

## CONCLUSION

In important respects the Cold War tended to reinforce Mahanism in Western states. It underlined the apparent significance of navies as measures of power. That measure was especially significant to the United States because in competition with the Soviet Union it was a sphere in which it could claim and maintain superiority. The relevance of that competitive approach seems less important in the post-Cold War world. State governments and inter-governmental organizations such as NATO will continue to control navies and determine their use. The prospect of a world government is remote and not necessarily desirable anyway. But states are also having to reconsider their role in the international system as a consequence of the problems in identifying an enemy whose activities could lead to a system-threatening war, requiring Mahanist preparations and responses, the strengthening role of non-state actors in international politics, threats arising from non-military security, and globalization processes.

However, the central tenet of Mahanism is clearly not dead in parts of the world where naval power is used to sustain regional ambitions, and it may also represent a latent threat to Western interest in the free movement of shipping. Yet the potential impact on traditional naval powers need not be exaggerated. For as long as naval ambitions are regionally-based, the most appropriate philosophy for the Western naval powers would be to encourage low-level confidence-building and identify areas of common concern to which the apparatus of state defence can contribute.

Integration or role specialization at sea is essentially a political matter, and in this respect NATO cooperation may be exceptional. It would have been far-fetched a few years ago to predict that French warships would be operating in a combined NATO-WEU Adriatic task force delegated to Commander of Allied Naval Forces Southern Europe (COMNAVSOUTH). But political conditions have changed and with them some of the old barriers to naval cooperation have come down. In operational terms, Western naval powers offer high levels of expertise, training, technology and interoperability with like-minded navies. This sophistication is not matched elsewhere. But in the post-Cold War period the relative ease of deployment of warships and their ability to capitalize on the Cold War legacy of common doctrine and exercise experience, has made them highly significant elements in coalition building. The dissemination of Western tactical

publications in unclassified form and such contacts as the Russia-UK-US (RUKUS) dialog offers the potential to broaden this process.

From a naval perspective, the end of the Cold War creates conditions for extending the cooperative processes already successfully established by Western navies for war-fighting to international peace support operations. The financial pressures on all navies, including the more capable "medium" powers is likely to impel reinforced multilateralism even the Royal Navy has latterly become more enamored of European naval cooperation in a WEU framework. Even a White Paper on Security is conceivable in the future.<sup>43</sup> From a Western perspective, navies will not cease to be instruments of state policy, but state policy will be increasingly difficult to define narrowly. In the post-imperialist, post-mercantilist, post-Cold War world, national interests will be increasingly defined in multinational contexts. In effect, we are also entering a post-Mahanist world and navies will be expected to adapt accordingly.

## Endnotes

This article originated as a paper presented at workshops at Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth and the University of British Columbia, Vancouver in 1994-95. Thanks are due to the participants, especially Eric Grove and Rear Adm. Bruce Johnston CMM, CD. Sadly, Peter Nailor's death was announced during its preparation for publication. The article is humbly dedicated to the memory of that inspiring scholar and epicurean commentator on security issues.

1. Peter Nailor, "The role of maritime power in the defence of Western Europe, past and present, as one aspect of the world-wide maritime scene," paper presented at RNC Greenwich and University of Southampton Conference (21-24 September 1971).

2. See particularly, Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1890), chap.1; *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1897). For a critique of Mahan, see Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), *passim*.

3. See, for example, Colin S. Gray, "History for Strategists: British Seapower as a Relevant Past," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 17, no. 1 (March 1994), pp. 7-32.

4. Cited by Philip A. Crowl, "Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Naval Historian," in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1986), p. 444.

5. See, for example, Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 112; George Modelski and William R. Thompson, *Seapower in Global Politics, 1494-1993* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 17, 133-35.

6. See, for example, Edward Luttwak, *The Political Use of Sea Power* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Ken Booth, *Law, Force, and Diplomacy at Sea* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985); Eric Grove, *The Future of Sea Power* (London and Annapolis, MD: Routledge and Naval Institute Press, 1990); James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy: political applications of limited naval force, 1919-1991* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan and IISS, 1994).
7. See Harold J. Kearsley, *Maritime Power in the Twenty-first Century* (Aldershot, UK: Dartmouth Publishing, 1992), pp. 21-23.
8. See John B. Hattendorf and Stan Weeks, "NATO's Policeman on the Beat," US Naval Institute *Proceedings*, (September 1998), pp. 66-71.
9. Thomas M. Franck, *The Power of Legitimacy Among Nations* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 112.
10. John Pay, "Full Circle: The US Navy and Its Carriers, 1974-1993," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 17, no. 1 (March 1994), pp. 124-47.
11. Jan Breemer argues that the US strategic doctrine, "From the Sea," signals the end of the Mahanist philosophy of fighting for sea dominance. It represents the beginning of the rediscovery of concepts of non-fighting roles and support for expeditionary warfare on land. Jan Breemer, "Home From the Sea: have we entered a new era of maritime strategic thinking?," in Peter T. Haydon and Ann L. Griffiths, eds., *Maritime Forces in Global Security* (Halifax, NS: Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, Dalhousie University, 1995), pp. 27-36.
12. The theory popularized by Norman Angell in *The Great Illusion* (London: William Heinemann, 1910), but virtually forgotten until resurrected by Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1988).
13. John Dunn, "Political Obligation," in David Held, ed., *Political Theory Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 36-39.
14. Oscar Schachter, "Sovereignty and Threats to Peace," in Thomas G. Weiss, ed., *Collective Security in a Changing World* (Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner, 1994), p. 38.
15. David Held, "Democracy, the Nation-State and the Global System," in Held, ed., *Political Theory Today*. From the extensive literature on this subject, see the useful surveys by Paul Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-first Century* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), pp.122-34; James N. Rosenau, "Governance in the Twentieth-first Century," *Global Governance*, 1, no. 1 (1995), pp. 13-43.

16. Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 37; Richard A. Falk, Samuel S. Kim and Saul H. Mendlovitz, *The United Nations and a Just World Order* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), pp. 1-12.

17. "The Clinton Administration's Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations," *US Department of State Dispatch*, 16 May 1994, pp. 315-21.

18. *US Naval Doctrine Publication 1 (NDP1)*, Department of the Navy, Washington DC, 1994. The US Naval Doctrine Command, established by the Navy Department in 1993 was tasked, among other things, to "provide a coordinated Navy-Marine Corps voice in joint and multinational doctrine development." Liaison officers from the UK, Canada, Australia, France and Italy have been attached to the Command. Conversation with James Tritten, US Naval Doctrine Command, in Vancouver, 24 February 1995. Academic work has also explored naval multilateralism. See Larry J. Bockman, Barry L. Coombs and Andrew W. Forsyth, "The Employment of Maritime Forces in Support of United Nations Resolutions," (Newport, RI: Center for Naval Warfare Studies, US Naval War College, 1994).

19. In Spain, Italy and Germany, participation in multilateral Western European Union tasks connected with the Gulf War, legitimized national decision-making, and in France the war exposed the limitations of Gaullism. See chaps 3-5 and 9 in Nicole Gnesotto and John Roper, eds., *Western Europe and the Gulf* (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, WEU, 1994). In the UK, doctrinal development includes missions in support of UN resolutions. In Canada international activities are placed well to the fore; see Maritime Command, *The Naval Vision: Charting the Course for Canada's Maritime Forces into the 21st Century* (Ottawa, 1994).

20. Geoffrey Till, "Maritime Strategy and the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 17, no. 1, pp. 176-99.

21. International Maritime Organisation, *Focus on IMO* (London: IMO, January 1992), p. 3.

22. For the market economics of the shipping industry as it affects the UK, see Michael Asteris, "British Merchant Shipping: Market Forces and the Defence of the Realm," *Royal Bank of Scotland Review*, 171 (September 1991), pp. 32-45. For the impact on safety at sea, see Australian Commonwealth Parliament, *Ships of Shame: Inquiry into Ship Safety*, Report from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport, Communications and Infrastructure (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, December 1992); House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology, *Safety Aspects of Ship Design and Technology*, Session 1991-92, 2nd Report, HL Paper 30-1 (London: HMSO, 14 February 1992); *Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas* [the Donaldson Report] (London: HMSO, 1994).



23. "No Royal Navy protection for Non-Brits, Urges RMT," *The Seaman*, June/July 1992, p. 1.
24. See Michael C. Pugh, "Piracy and armed robbery at sea: problems and remedies," *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*, 2, no. 1, pp. 1-18. James Cable contrasts the tentative response of the late twentieth century with the robust naval response of the nineteenth century, in *Gunboat Diplomacy*, p. 155.
25. The Royal Navy's role in this respect, for example, dates from the sixteenth century. See generally, Lt.Cmdr. S. W. Haines, Royal Navy, "The Provision of Military Aid to Civil Authorities in Britain's Maritime Domain," (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 1992).
26. Commission of the European Communities, "Communication for the Commission to the Council on the Outcome of Negotiations with Canada on Fisheries, Including a Proposal for a Council Decision," COM (95) 400 Brussels, 16 April 1995. For a history of troubled relations between Canada and EU, see "Fisheries in the NAFO Area: Background Notes on Recent Events," European Commission, Directorate-General XIV Fisheries, Brussels, 22 March 1995, pp. 15-16. Interview with Marco Zatterin (European Commission *Service du Porte Parole*), Brussels, May 1995.
27. UN doc. A/Conf.164/22/Rev.1. For the troubled negotiations, see Ronald Barston, "United Nations Conference on straddling and highly migratory fish stocks," *Marine Policy*, 19, no. 2 (1995), pp. 159-66; "Mammoth Task Keeping Talks on Track," *Fishing News International*, (May 1995), pp. 6-7; *Eurofish Report*, 17 August 1995, Brussels Briefing, pp. 1-2.
28. See Michael Pugh, "Policing the Seas: The Challenge of Good Governance", in Gert de Nooy, ed., *The Role of European Naval Forces After the Cold War* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International/Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 1996), pp. 105-31.
29. Oran R. Young, *International Cooperation: Building Regimes for Natural Resources and the Environment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).
30. Capt. Guillermo R. Delamer (Argentine Navy), "Prospects for Multinational Cooperation in the South Atlantic," in Haydon and Griffiths, eds., *Maritime Forces in Global Security*, pp. 169-79.
31. Ian Kemp, "WEU moves to bolster military organizations," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 27 May 1995, p. 6.
32. Chief of Naval Staff, "The Royal Navy - Taking Maritime Power into the New Millennium," address to Royal United Services Institute, London, 7 June 1995; also Directorate of Naval Staff Duties, *The Fundamentals of British Maritime Doctrine (BR106)* (London: HMSO, 1995), esp. chap. 5.

33. Ken Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p. 223.
34. Michael A. Morris, *Expansion of Third-World Navies* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1987), p. 1.
35. In the 1980s, Taiwan's coastal force grew from 49 to 141; Thailand's from 64 to 118; Singapore's from 17 to 43; South Korea's from 57 to 112. Robert Holzer, "Small Patrol Craft Will Dominate Sales," *Defense News*, 1-7 November 1993, pp. 8, 28. North Korea's submarine fleet increased from 16 to 24 boats between 1979 and 1992. In the same period Indonesia's major combatants increased from 9 to 17; Thailand's from 6 to 10 and Japan's from 27 to 47. Thailand is building an aircraft carrier and Japan is building *Aegis* destroyers. South Korea plans to acquire 7 submarines as part of a naval expansion that would bring it into the same rank as Britain or France. Desmond Ball, "The Post-Cold War Maritime Strategic Environment in East Asia," in Dick Sherwood, ed., *Maritime Power in the China Seas: Capabilities and Rationale* (Canberra: Australian Defence Studies Centre, 1994), pp. 3-34.
36. Cross-Pacific trade among the ASEAN states, China, Japan, Taiwan, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand represents over a third of the world's total, and the world's busiest ports and waterways are in Asia. Sam Bateman, "Regional Maritime Co-operation in the Asia-Pacific Region and the Security of SLOCs," paper at Conference on "Cooperative Security at Sea," University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 23-25 February 1995.
37. Michael Pugh, "Maritime Flashpoints in the China Seas," *Jane's Annual Intelligence Review*, (January 1995); Eric Hyer, "The South China Sea Territorial Dispute: Implications of China's Earlier Settlements," paper at 34th ISA Convention, Acapulco, 23-27 March 1993. B.A. Hamzah, "Conflicting maritime claims in the South China Sea: the scope for resolution," in Ross Babbage and Sam Bateman, eds., *Maritime Change: Issues for Asia* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1993), pp. 96-109.
38. See Jun Zhan, "China Goes to the Blue Waters: The Navy, Seapower Mentality and the South China Sea," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 17, no. 3 (September 1994), pp. 180-208.
39. Ian Anthony, *The Naval Arms Trade* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press/SIPRI, 1990), p. 165. See also, for example, reference to chronic maintenance problems in the Indian Navy, Sunil Dasgupta, "The Navy: In Troubled Waters," *India Today*, 30 April 1994, pp. 70-71.
40. Michael D. Wallace and Charles A. Meconis, "New Powers, Old Patterns: The Dangers of the Naval Buildup in the Asia-Pacific Region," paper at Conference on "Cooperative Security at Sea," University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 23-25 February 1995.

41. See generally, Andrew Mack, ed., *A Peaceful Ocean?: Maritime Security in the Pacific in the Post-Cold War Era* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1993); Nicholas Cumming Bruce, "Pacific Rim states launch security forum," *The Guardian* (UK), 27 July 1993, p. 9.

42. See Pauline Kerr, "The Prospects for Naval Dialogue and Cooperation in Northeast Asia," in Sherwood, ed., *Maritime Power in the China Seas*, pp. 137-42; Sam Bateman, "Maritime Confidence and Security-Building Measures in the Asia Pacific Area," in Kevin Clements, ed., *Peace and Security in the Asia Pacific Region* (Tokyo: United Nations University, 1993), pp. 281-89. ASEAN states have already signed hot-pursuit agreements to combat piracy. Naval representatives from throughout the Pacific-Asia region have held biennial symposia to discuss common interests in hydrography, maritime training, control of shipping, the impact of the law of the sea and EEZ assistance to small states. See Michael Pugh, "Regional Co-operation at Sea," in Michael Pugh, ed., *Maritime Security and Peacekeeping* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 158-63.

43. In the Spring of 1994, M. Francois Léotard the French Defence Minister proposed a European White Paper on security, a suggestion which gained some support in the WEU General Assembly, Colloquy on "Organising Our Security," Official Record, Paris, 17 October 1994. On the "medium-ness" of naval power, see Rear-Admiral Richard Hill (Royal Navy ret.), "Do we need a New Definition of Medium Naval Power?," in Haydon and Griffiths, eds., *Maritime Forces in Global Security*, pp. 251-64.