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Strategy of Position.

The strategic value of any point depends upon three principal conditions:

1st. Its position. A place may have great strength, but be so situated with regard to the strategic lines as not to be worth occupying.

2d. Its military strength, offensive and defensive. A place may be well situated and have large resources, and yet possess little strategic value because weak. It may on the other hand, while not naturally strong, be given artificial strength for defense. The word fortify means simply to make strong. This is the province of the Military Engineer. Offensive strength can be less easily given than mere defensive.

3d. The resources of the place itself and the surrounding country. It is needless to explain the advantages of copious resource, or the disadvantage of the reverse. A conspicuous example of a place strong both for offense and defense and admirably situated, yet without natural resources, is Gibraltar. The maintenance of this advanced post of England depended in the past, wholly upon her control of the sea. Resources that are wanting naturally may be supplied artificially; and to a greater extent now than formerly. Malta and Minorca illustrate the same truth but to a less degree; and generally, in sea strategic points, the smaller the surrounding friendly territory, the fewer the resources and the less the strength. In 1798-1800 the French garrison in Valetta was cut off from the resources of the Island of Malta by the revolt of the islanders under English support; and, being rigidly blockaded by sea, its resistance was ended by exhaustion. It follows from these considerations that, other things being equal, a small island is of less strategic value

than a large one; and a point like Key West, at the end of a long narrow peninsula, from which, as well as from the nearest railroad terminus it is separated by many miles of water, is inferior to Pensacola; and would be to Havana, if Cuba were a thriving country.

As an illustration of the advantage of a large island over a small, or several small ones, I will read you the opinion of the well known Admiral Rodney found in an official memorandum. Rodney had a very long experience of the West Indies both in peace and war. (See Rodney's Life. Appendix Vol. 1 Porto Rico)

I give this as an instance of what I have said before of the recognition of the strategic value of places by men who had not

You find here, it may be added, mentioned all the advantages of a strategic point - though not given in the orderly systematic manner at which a treatise on the Art of War should aim.

Where all three conditions, Position, Intrinsic Strength, and Abundant Resources are found in the same place, it becomes of great consequence strategically, and may be, of the very first importance, though not always. For it must be remarked that there are other conditions, lesser in the purely military point of view, which enhance the value of a seaport even strategically; such as its being a great mart of trade, a blow to which would infinitely harm the prosperity of the country; or the Capital, the fall of which has a political effect to its importance otherwise.

Of the three principal conditions the first, Position, is the most important; because strength and resources can be artificially supplied or increased, but it passes the power of man to change the position of a port which lies outside the limits of strategic effect.

Generally, Value of Position, depends upon nearness to a sea route, to those lines of trade which, when drawn upon the ocean common, are as imaginary as the parallels of the chart, yet as really and usefully exist. If the position be on two routes at the same time, that is, near the crossing, the value is enhanced. Those familiar with works of the Art of Land War will recognize the analogies. It becomes yet more marked if, by the lay of the land, the road to be followed becomes very narrow as the Straits of Gibraltar, the English Channel, and in a less degree the Florida Straits. Perhaps narrowing should be applied to any inlet of the sea by which trade enters into and is distributed over a great extent of country such as the mouth of the Mississippi, the Dutch and German Rivers, New York &c.

As regards the sea however such points are usually termini or entrepots, at which goods are transhipped before going further. If the road be narrowed to a mere canal, or to the mouth of a River, the point to which vessels must come is reduced almost to the geometrical definition, and near-by positions have great command. Suez has this condition now, and Central America may soon have. So also positions in narrow seas are much more important than in the Great Ocean, because it is not possible to avoid them by circuit; and if these seas are not merely termini of travel, but highways; that is, if commerce not only comes to them but passes through to other fields beyond, the number of passing ships is increased and thereby the strategic value of controlling points. It may perhaps be well for me to illustrate what I mean by termini and highways by the instance of the Mediterranean. Before the cutting of the Suez Canal - the Levant and Isthmus were termini, ships could not pass - nor goods except by transshipment. Since the canal the Levant became a point on a

highway, and its sea a highway, not a termini of trade. The same remarks apply of course to our isthmus and any future canal there. The Mediterranean with the Isthmus now fulfills these conditions; the Caribbean in part does so, and will yet more fully if the canal be cut. If Bermuda be compared with Gibraltar as to position only, the advantage of the latter will be seen at once and the argument illustrated; for shipping must pass close by the latter, while Bermuda, strong as it is, regarded as a Depot, may be avoided by a circuit, involving inconvenience and delay, but still possible.

A radical difference underlying the conditions of land and sea strategy is to be found in the fact that the land is by nature full of obstacles, the removing or overcoming which by men's hands open communications or roads. By nature the land is almost all obstacle - the sea almost all open plain. The roads which can be followed by an army are therefore of limited number, and are generally known, as well as their respective advantages; whereas, at sea there is almost an infinity of paths by which a ship can pass from one point to another; especially if a steamer, and content to make a circuit. The condition of winds, currents &c. certainly do combine with shortness of distance to tie ships down to certain general lines; but within these lines there is great scope for ingenuity in dodging the search of an enemy. Nap's *Faussas rantis et moments perdus*. A very interesting historical instance was the pursuit of Bonaparte's Egyptian Expedition by Nelson in 1798. The French Commander-in-Chief, after leaving Malta, directed his course first for Candia, instead of towards Egypt. Nelson naturally and properly pushed direct for Egypt; unluckily he had not a single frigate for lookout service, and consequently diverged from the French track and lost them; the wake of the two fleets actually crossed on the same night, but a light haze hid them from each other

These same reasons made it necessary made it necessary for England during the great wars to keep a close lookout, if not a blockade, at the entrance of the French harbors, which thus became strategic points; for if the fleet within once got away and was lost to sight, nothing was left to the English commander but to reason out as well as he could their probable line of action. For these reasons, strategic points within a given area, will be fewer on sea than land, a fact which naturally heightens the strategic value of such as do exist. The sea indeed realizes the supposed case of the Archduke Charles. He says; "In open countries, which are every where practicable, and in which the enemy can move without obstacle in every direction, there are either no strategic points, or there are but few. On the contrary many are to be met in broken countries, where nature has irrevocably traced the roads which must be followed." As a ship goes from Europe to Central America she passes first through a wholly open country, until reaching the West Indies; there she enters one that is broken, and abounding in strategic points of greater or less value.

The amount of trade that passes, enters into the question as well as the nearness of the port to the route; and whatever affects either, affects the value of the position. Hence an Isthmian Canal, because of the consequent increase of trade passing that way will change the strategic value of nearly every port in the Caribbean and Pacific. Sea Power primarily depends upon commerce, and military control follows upon trade for its furtherance and protection. Except as a system of highways joining country to country, the sea is an unfruitful possession. Pregnant thought - The sea or water is Nature's great medium of circulation.

In general however it will be found that by sea as well as by land, useful strategic points will be where highways pass,

and especially where they centre; above all, where obstacles force parallel roads to converge and use a single defile. It may be remarked here that while the ocean road is easier, and has generally fewer obstacles, than the land, yet the obstacles are more truly impassable. Ships cannot generally force their way over or through obstacles, but must pass around them, turn them. Historical feats such as those of Napoleon crossing Little St. Bernard, McDonald the Splügen, and the Russians in 1877 the Balkan, seem to show that nothing is impassable to infantry; but modern ships have not yet been dragged over dry land like the ancient galleys. Hence, while the defenses of what seems to be the only practicable road may be unexpectedly turned by an army ashore, certainty can be felt that ships can only follow certain paths. Where there are many of these, as for instance the passages between the Windward Islands or Lesser Antilles, the position value of the ports at each passage is proportionately diminished. Consider, for instance, the enormous influence upon the value of Port Royal, Martinique and Port Castries in St. Lucia, already good strategic points, if a continuous line of land extended from the east end of Haiti through the Lesser Antilles to South America, broken only at the passage between the two islands - their position would then be almost identical with that of Gibraltar. There can be no question that, whatever the intrinsic military strength of the ports in the Windward Islands, their position-value is seriously lowered by the fact that an enemy's shipping, bound to the isthmus, can by a circuit avoid passing near them. It cannot so avoid Jamaica; still less the Chiriqui Lagoon; least of all Aspinwall, if the Lesseps canal become a fact. It is possible for instance that in war between England and France a ship wishing to avoid passing near Sta. Lucia could go through the Amgada

or Mona Passage, and in fact this dodge was often successfully resorted to by the French to avoid Rodney's lying in wait.

We now come to the second element in the strategic value of any point: its military strength, offensive and defensive.

It is possible to imagine a point very well placed (they yet) practically indefensible, because the cost of defensive works would be greater than the worth of the place when fortified. A much stronger site, though somewhat further off, would throw such a point out of consideration.

There are a great many elements, advantageous or disadvantageous which enter into the characteristics making a port strong or weak; but they will all be found to range themselves under the two heads of offensive and defensive strength.

The defense of ports belongs chiefly to the army and primarily to the Military Engineer. It is not meant to be denied that the Navy, under certain conditions, may play an important part even in a distinctly defensive role; but the general assertion, not the unqualified, may be safely made that the defense of ports belongs to the land forces; and as a corollary to the general proposition it is to be added that when the navy has to aid, it must be in a sphere of minor importance.

In the English manoeuvres this August it was found, as might have been predicted that it is impossible for a blockading force to prevent the escape of single ships. When such had escaped there was shown 1st. what has already been said as to the utter perplexity of the blockader as to the direction taken and 2d the futility of depending upon the Navy alone for

defense of sea ports. The escaped cruisers appeared before half a dozen English ports which had at once to admit their powerlessness in the absence of fortifications and to pay ransom.

The perplexity of the blockaders after the escape of the enemy will receive further illustration in the historical lectures.

The proper part of the navy in any scheme of Coast Defense is that which is called by Jomini the defensive - offensive; a defensive, that is, which relies upon the injury it does the enemy to protect itself (own interests) [Any floating defense which is confined to the defensive, by which I mean that it can only put forth its offensive power when the enemy attacks, is then inferior to the same amount of weight as a land work; because it is open to modes of attack to which the land work is not open, as the torpedo and the ram; because the very factor which constitutes its chief strength, its mobility, is also a source of weakness by necessitating the attention of a large part of the personnel, or garrison, to the mere handling of the fortification. To this is to be added a consideration important to my mind though I have not seen it elsewhere, that a system of coast defense relying mainly upon the navy is liable to be drawn in a mass to a point other than the enemy's real objective and so leave the latter uncovered. Land works are not open to that mistake. This proposition receives the illustration by way in which during our war, as in all wars, armies in the field, which, like ships, can be moved, have under the influence of fears at the Capitol been moved from good strategic positions to bad. Permanent works, established in quiet moments on sound principles, have the advantage that they cannot be shifted under the influence of panic. To this should be added Nelson's orders about the stationary ships in Tames which were there, practically, as permanent

fortifications.

A moment's thought will show that one mode of coast defense by the navy to which attention is very largely directed now-a-days, that by torpedo boats, is not truly defensive in its action, but offensive. The torpedo boat for harbor defense is almost confined to an offensive role, the defensive-offensive, because an attack by a fleet upon a port will almost infallibly be by daylight while the torpedo boat, in the general scheme of harbor defense, must confine its efforts mainly to the night. The chief role of the torpedo boat is in attack upon a hostile fleet which is trying to maintain its ground near the port.

Defenses, whether natural or artificial, covering strategic points, play a very important part in all warfare, because they interpose such passive resistance to the assailant as to enable a smaller force to hold in check a larger. Their passive strength thus becomes equivalent to a certain number of men, and allows the holder to let loose just so many to join the active army in the field. Places so held serve many purposes and in some proportion are absolutely necessary to the control of any theatre of war; they are as essential to sea as to land war; but looked upon as conducive to the attainment of the objects of a war, they are to be considered inferior to the army in the field. (To take an extreme case, a reductio ad absurdum, if the number of such posts was so great that their garrisons swallowed up the whole army of the state, it is evident that either some of them must be abandoned or the enemy's army be left unopposed. Thus Jomini says "When a state finds itself reduced to throw the greater part of its force into strong places, it is near touching its ruin.") In the sphere of maritime war, the navy represents the army in the field, and the fortified,

strategic harbors, upon which it falls back as ports of refuge, after battle or defeat, for repairs or for supplies, correspond precisely to those strongholds (like Metz, Strasbourg, Ulm, Ratisbon) upon which, systematically occupied with reference to the strategic character of the theatre of war, military writers agree, the defense of a country must be founded. The foundation, however, must not be taken for the superstructure, for which it exists; in war the defensive exists mainly that the offensive may act more freely. In sea warfare the offensive may act more freely. In sea warfare the offensive is assigned to the navy; and if the latter assumes to itself the defensive, it but locks up a part of its trained men in garrison which could as well be filled by forces that have not their peculiar skill. ² (To this main proposition I must add a corollary; that, if the defense of the ports, many in number, be attributed to the navy, experience shows that the Navy will be subdivided among them to an extent that will paralyze its efficiency. I was amused, but at the same time much instructed as to popular understanding of war, by the consternation aroused in Great Britain by one summer's manoeuvres already alluded to, and the remedy proposed in some papers. It appeared that several seaports were open to bombardment, and consequent enactment of subsidies by a small squadron, and it was gravely argued that the navy should be large enough to open a small detachment to each port. But of what use is a navy, if it is to be thus whittled away. But a popular outcry will drown the voice of military wisdom. I shall have more to say on this in September. I think you will find also that where the Navy is relied upon for a pure defensive the demand will naturally follow for many small vessels; a gun-boat policy; for tonnage in big vessels will not go round.

For these reasons, I do not propose to discuss at large

believing as I do that it very directly concerns Naval Strategy, the elements going to make a seaport strong defensively. I have thought it proper however to put before you reasons for rejecting the opinion that the navy is a proper instrument, generally speaking, for Coast Defense, in the narrow sense of the word, and I will refer you further to my definitions.) There is an opinion afloat which I believe wrong and mischievous that the best coast defense in that narrow sense is a navy. With a very large navy and a comparatively short coast line like England's there may be some truth in this though, less now than formerly. With our great sea frontier, I hold the opinion is wrong, for the reasons given; which may be thus summed up and reduced to four principles:

1. That, for the same amount of offensive power, floating batteries or vessels or very little mobility are less strong defensively than land works.

2. That by employing able-bodied sea faring men to defend harbors you lock up offensive strength in an inferior, that is in a defensive, effort.

3. That it is injurious to the morale and skill of seamen to keep them thus on the defensive and off the sea. This has received abundant historical proof in the past.

4. That in giving up the offensive, the navy gives up its proper sphere, which is also the most glorious.

The offensive strength of a seaport considered independently of its strategic situation and of its natural and acquired resources consists in its capacity:

1. To assemble and hold a large military force, both of ships of war and transports.

2. To launch such force safely and easily into the deep; and 3. To follow it with a continued support until the campaign is ended.

It may be truthfully urged that this continued support depends as much upon the strategic situation and the resources

of the port as upon its strength. (To this however must be replied that it was never meant that the division between the different elements which together make up the total value of a seaport was clear cut and absolute. The division into heads is simply a convenient way by which the subject can be arranged and grasped more clearly; some necessary conditions will affect more or less both strength, position and resources and will, unavoidably re-appear under different heads.)

1. It will be seen that depth of entrance and the area of anchoring ground for large vessels are elements of offensive strength. Without depth the largest ships of war could not go in and out, and without great extent the requisite fleet could not be assembled.

Depth of water however may be a source of weakness defensively because allowing the entrance of the enemy's heavy vessels. In a port of secondary importance fitted only to be a base for commerce destroying, E.G. Wilmington, N.C. there would be no gain of offensive strength, but rather loss of defensive, by great depth at entrance.

Suitable ground on shore, for the establishment of dockyards and in store houses for the maintenance, repair and supply of ships is a necessary condition of offensive strength. That this ground should be so situated as not to be open to injury by the enemy is a condition of defensive strength; and the same is to be said in the anchorage ground.

Healthy ground in the neighborhood for the encampment or lodging of troops &c. may be properly included in the elements of military strength, both offensive and defensive.

II. To launch a force safely and easily into the deep implies that when ready to start it can go at once and take up its order of battle, in the presence of an enemy, unmolested; favored in doing so, either by the nature of the ground outside

allowing the necessary manoeuvring without interference, or by the protection of the fort, covering the fleet with its defensive power. It is of course, perfectly conceivable and possible that a fleet may, by its own power ensure its own freedom of manoeuvre; but the time occupied in changing from one order to another is always critical, and such manoeuvres should be performed out of the reach of the enemy. In the open sea it is the business of the admiral to see that he is not caught with his order of battle unformed; but it will rarely happen that a large fleet can leave port in the same order in which it will fight. It is necessary in order to complete the offensive strength of the place, that it should be able by its own means, to cover the fleet during such change of formation; beyond that the offensive strength of the port for this purpose cannot be expected to reach. This case is exactly parallel to that of an army passing through a defile - room must be secured beyond to deploy.

If the entrance be narrow, the fleet must get outside before being able to manoeuvre; in this case the conditions of offensive and defensive strength again clash, for a narrow and tortuous entrance is most easy to defend. Such an outlet as the South Pass of the Mississippi is specially unfavorable to the manoeuvres of the fleet, being so narrow as to allow only one vessel to pass and a sharp turn at right angles outside the jetties. As no land defenses, properly so called, can be established below the Head of the Passes, this condition is a serious difficulty to a fleet wishing to get out in the face of a close blockade; and therefore a great drawback to the advantages otherwise conferred, by the position of the mouths of the Mississippi, the depth of the entrance, and the immense resources and lines of water carriage of the Mississippi Valley. It will not unfrequently be found,

signal flying that the French were out, it was with a gale blowing from the northwest against which it was hopeless to attempt to beat; besides which a winter night was falling. Nelson at once weighed and passed out through a narrow channel to the eastward; himself leading and each ship steering by the light of her next ahead. Passing down to the leeward of Sardinia, he hauled around the southern end into the same part of the Mediterranean as the French, reasonably sure that they could not have outstripped the speed of his frigates nor of his fleet.

III . Resources.

(The wants of a navy are so many and varied, that it would be lost time to name them separately. The resources which meet them may be usefully divided under two heads: natural and artificial. The latter again may be conveniently and accurately subdivided into resources developed by man in his peaceful occupation and use of a country, and those which are immediately and solely created for the maintenance of war.)

Other things being equal, the most favorable condition is that where great natural resources, joined to a good position for trade, have drawn men to settle and develop the neighboring country. Where the existing resources are purely artificial, and for war, the value of the port, in so far, is inferior to that of one where the ordinary occupations of the people supply the necessary resources. To use the phraseology, of our subject, a seaport that has a good strategic position and great military strength, but to which all resources must be brought from a distance, is much inferior to a similar port having a rich and developed friendly region behind it. Gibraltar and ports of small islands, like Sta. Lucia and Martinique labor under this disadvantage, as compared with ports of England, France, the United States, or even of a big island like Cuba, if the latter were settled by an industrious trading

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people. The mutual dependence of commerce and the navy is nowhere more clearly seen than in the naval resources of a nation whose greatness depends upon peaceful trade and shipping. Compared with a merely military navy it is the difference between a natural and forced growth.