

# Geography, Seapower, Grand Strategy and American Values

*Barney Ruben*

*"I do not say, my Lords, that the French will not come. I say only they will not come by sea".*

*Admiral Sir John Jervis, 1st Earl of St. Vincent,  
addressing House of Lords as First Lord of the  
Admiralty in 1801*

# American Values

- The United States derives its domestic tranquility and cohesiveness from the fundamental condition that Americans' national identity is political, not cultural
- That political identity is founded on the principles articulated in the Declaration of Independence, mechanized by the Constitution and refined by Lincoln's Gettysburg Address
- This self identity, along with the unique geographic circumstances of the nation, has always conditioned our foreign policy and our grand strategy
- The legitimacy of our government is tied to adherence to our fundamental values, both in its relations with the citizenry and also in its relations to other countries

# Grand Strategy

- National needs:
  - Defense of Homeland
  - Economic Well-being
  - Favorable World Order
  - Promotion or Protection of Values
- Grand strategy is the scheme for meeting these needs over time

For the US, Defense of Homeland and Economic Well-being have been givens; We have gone to war under circumstances of to maintain a Favorable World Order , and used the favorable Outcomes to promote our values.

# Geographic Drivers

- **Strategic Depth** – the ability to absorb surprise
- **Insulation** – existence of geographic barriers permits the ability to choose your fights
- **Global Access** – combination of coastline and secure continental borders provides the ability to reach out commercially and militarily to wherever strategy and policy dictate
- **Coast line** – highway of outside access to one's homeland
- **Natural resources** – ability to achieve economic independence

The possession of these geographic conditions has allowed  
The United States to conduct a foreign policy generally consistent with  
Its value system

# US Geographic Analysis

- **Has enjoyed strategic depth due to the surrounding oceans and a strong navy**
  - US could afford to adopt a neutral stance until a clear path was evident
  - SSBN technology allowed for a secure second strike capability in nuclear realm
- **Has enjoyed insulation from Eurasian struggles by virtue of location and developmental history**
  - US has generally acted as an objective party
  - Its power was not regarded as a traditional threat
  - Its value system was respected
- **Has had few geographic constraints on global access owing to the extent of its territory and the benign relationships with Canada and Mexico**
  - US became globally oriented from its inception
- **Extensive coastline provides numerous ports and a massive economic zone, but prevents effective, comprehensive coastal defense**
  - After 1898, a fleet-oriented defense served to deter any potential challengers to the Monroe Doctrine
  - Coast defense was repeatedly tried and discarded
- **Substantially self-sufficient in resources for most of its history**
  - Trade has been an enriching process rather than an economic survival requirement

This has permitted a grand strategy of the strategic defensive

# What Has Changed

- **Strategic Depth:** 9/11 attacks shut down air travel for a week – indications that US economy could be seriously damaged by a terrorist attack
- **Insulation:** the 9/11 attacks damaged the perception of insulation because terrorists might smuggle WMD into the homeland
- **Global Access:** Land border vulnerabilities starting to absorb military resources
- **Coastline:** Continued illegal immigration and flow of drugs highlights vulnerability of coasts
- **Natural Resources:** US now dependent on external sources of materials and manufacturing

North Korean development of ICBMs and Iranian nuclear program have complicated the concept of deterrence

# Effects of Change

## Basic effect

### US adopts a grand strategy of the strategic offensive

- In the absence of strategic depth and deterrability, preventing threat formation is critical
  - Preventative and preemptive war now a policy
  - Iraq an example of attempting to impose democracy
- In the absence of insulation and strategic depth, and with economic dependency, the US acts like any other Eurasian country
  - US loses its special disinterested status
- Promotion of values becomes assertive
  - US loses exemplary status (“city on a hill”)
  - Others see us as just another culture
- Calls for a new form of coastal defense
  - Massive investments on homeland defense

Perceived necessity drives grand strategy away from linkage with values

# Strategic Side Effects

- US spends enormous sums on social engineering and projects overseas
  - On a perceived necessity vice a considered basis
  - Inflates offshore debt to the point China and EU can start calling shots
  - Less money available for long term internal improvements that enhance strategic posture
- Alienation of neutrals and allies
  - Loss of disinterested status
  - Viewed as potential threat or competitor
  - Potential anti-US coalitions
- Erosion of national self-image
  - Failed social engineering efforts breed cynicism
  - Eventual loss of perceived moral high ground



# What if...

**What if the oceans could once more be turned into effective strategic barriers?**

- Insulation and strategic depth regained, allowing return to politically advantageous strategic defensive
- Sea-based ballistic missile defense replaces deterrence
- US can adopt a more neutral and disinterested stance
- NCA can afford to “wait and see”
- Promotion of values can be exemplary vice assertive
- Free flow of trade a beneficial by-product

# Seapower and Grand Strategy

- Effective seapower in the grand strategy context is the kind that can reestablish the oceans (and ICBM trans-oceanic tracks) as barriers
- Effective seapower can influence grand strategy by providing policy options available in no other way
  - NCA can shift to the strategic defensive
  - Strategic side effects reduced/avoided
- New sea control (Global Commons Awareness) must be considered as the primary strategic task of the USN
  - GCA gained via new technology and cooperative operations with other countries

# A New Maritime Strategy

- GCA becomes principal strategic mission of USN in conjunction with USCG, joint infrastructure, USG in general and other nations
- Maritime Theater Security Cooperation focuses on building global maritime security network (1KSN)
- Maritime Ballistic Missile Defense (theater and national) a companion strategic mission
- Defense of MBMD stations is the key USN operational warfighting mission
- Joint warfighting support oriented on most critical MRC

But naval forces must also support global maneuver of the Marines, Army and Air Force across the spectrum of conflict

# GCA – The Strategic Link

- GCA provides the NCA with strategic breathing room
  - GCA is a strategic lynchpin concept that helps reestablish national strategic depth
- GCA is a strategic mission vice an operational concept

# Nature of GCA

- GCA is not traditional sea control – it is much more extensive and intensive – knowledge of all relevant activity on the world's oceans
- GCA is an information-oriented concept, relying on timely intelligence that must be gained from a range of sources, including law enforcement, businesses and NGOs – and navies
- Intelligence must be fused, analyzed and distributed in a way that produces GCA

# Implications

- GCA can only be produced by the cooperative and closely coordinated actions of multiple agencies and countries
- GCA requires a globe-girdling, maritime-oriented C2 system that only the US Navy possesses but must be seamlessly integrated with STRATCOM/NORTHCOM space surveillance
- Therefore, the emerging MHQ/MOC should form the basis for GCA efforts and these centers should have interagency and international liaison authority

# Strategic Benefits

- Eliminates false dilemma of “muscular dominance” vs appeasement
  - US can again function as a global peacemaker
- Relieves pressure to “harden” US
  - Less incentive for domestic intel, etc.