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## Report Documentation Page

*Form Approved*  
*OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE <b>FEB 1987</b>	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED -			
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>A Strategic Approach to the Maritime - Continental Strategy Debate</b>		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER			
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER			
		5e. TASK NUMBER			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>National War College, 300 5th Avenue, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319-6000</b>		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER			
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)			
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)			
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT <b>see report</b>					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>		<b>46</b>	

THE NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE  
NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY  
STRATEGIC STUDY

A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO THE MARITIME-CONTINENTAL STRATEGY  
DEBATE

BY

Frank E. Jordan, III  
Department of the Navy

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH  
REQUIREMENT

Research Supervisor: Captain George Thibault, USN (Ret)

THE NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE  
FEBRUARY 1987

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THE NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE  
STRATEGIC STUDIES REPORT ABSTRACT

TITLE: A Strategic Approach to the Maritime - Continental  
Strategy Debate

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DATE: February 1987

This report addresses the historical and conceptual dimensions of the maritime-continent strategy debate as a conflict between two divergent approaches to national strategy development. The discussion first traces the origins of the conflict, and then analyzes the contending maritime and continental schools in terms of the strategic criteria of definition of the strategic problem, strategic purpose and approach, escalation control, and the strategic center of gravity. That framework draws heavily upon classic geopolitical thought, as well as several pertinent concepts of Clausewitz. Resolution is suggested through elaboration of those same criteria. The study concludes with a discussion of policy and force development implications.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mr. Frank E. Jordan, III has long been interested in the direction of strategic policy development as a result of his extensive experience in the policy analysis of strategic concepts development and wargaming, defense organization and decision-making processes, and the study of strategic theory and history. In addition to his civilian government experience, his military service includes that as an advisor in South Vietnam. He is a graduate of the University of Virginia, the University of South Carolina, and the National War College, Class of 1987.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM

#### INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to provide an uncommon perspective on the maritime-continental strategy debate through assessing the strategic validity of the contending arguments in terms of several basic categories of strategic structure and dynamics, and to apply those conclusions to a proposed resolution. The framework employed has been openly influenced by the revival of classic geopolitical thought, and the relevance of Clausewitz to maritime strategy insufficiently appreciated since Corbett's work of 1911. In those terms, moreover, the discussion argues that the current maritime-continental strategy debate artificially fractures the problem of a comprehensive defense strategy. For in fact the two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but, properly modified, comprise the elements of integrated global strategy. In the broader context of geopolitics, and the dynamics of the political object and military means, that strategy is ineluctably maritime strategy, but in which traditionally "continental" forces play a crucial, and more clearly defined role.

Winston Churchill, in reflecting upon the strategic disaster of the First World War, broached the contemporary maritime-continental strategy debate: "And why should the view be limited to the theater in which the best and largest armies



happen to face each other? Sea power, railway communications, foreign policy, present the means of finding new flanks outside the area of deadlock."<sup>1</sup> Churchill's insight revealed the pervasive conflict between two seemingly exclusive strategic approaches which has permeated national strategy development first in Britain, and currently in the United States. As with the German challenge to Britain prior to 1914, the dominant "heartland" power has, in addition to its manifest threat to the Eurasian rimlands, challenged the predominant maritime power through a "blue water" naval capability holding at risk areas and capabilities vital to her national survival. This Soviet drive for dependable access to the world's oceans, with the prospective domination of the rimlands and their narrow seas, threatens decisive global military and political leverage.<sup>2</sup> An inappropriate strategic choice could, as Britain nearly discovered, be irreversible.

#### BACKGROUND

Historically, the systematic contrast between maritime and continental strategies as two fundamentally different styles of warfare was first illuminated by Sir Julian Corbett prior to the Great War. He distinguished between "...the German or Continental School of Strategy and the British or Maritime School -- that is, our own traditional School..."<sup>3</sup> But the most vigorous proponent of the qualitative difference was Liddell Hart, who argued that the "continental" strategy of the Great War had perverted the notion of war as an instrument of

policy through the willful misapplication of the theories of Clausewitz. Britain had, at profound strategic costs, departed from her traditional "maritime" strategy of control of the oceans and "narrow seas," support of continental allies, and decisive, but surgical, land campaigns, which attained the classic political concept of "victory:" i.e., a condition more advantageous than not having gone to war. Yet for the first time in her history she..."grasped the glittering sword of Continental manufacture."<sup>4</sup>

The maritime-continental strategy debate is of fairly recent origin in the United States, where geographic isolation and virtually unlimited resources have precluded the necessity of choice.<sup>5</sup> World War II in fact witnessed the simultaneous conduct of a classic continental war of annihilation on the one hand, and the "...Mahanian triumph of sea power..." on the other.<sup>6</sup> However, the expansionist threat of the Soviet Union, relative declining military and economic power, the questionable reliability of the NATO alliance, and a significantly more ambitious global defense policy, has generated the proverbial "force-strategy mismatch" in the ensuing years.<sup>7</sup> The result has been disruption of the consonance between U.S. strategic ends and means, and the need for a strategy which not only deters the Soviet Union, but provides the means of successfully waging war as well.<sup>8</sup> Hence, a conceptually similar debate -- the relationship of global sea power to expansionist landpower -- has arisen. On the one hand, the "continentalists" emphasize the preeminent threat of Soviet conquest of Western

Europe accomplished through a blitzkrieg scenario in which naval power would be inconsequential. On the other, a countervailing "maritime" approach emphasizes surprise, mobility, and selective land campaigns to challenge the Soviets on strategically advantageous terms.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the complexities of the argument tend to be obscured by the historical and theoretical analogue of "Mahan versus Mackinder" in terms of which the issue is often framed.<sup>10</sup> That construct juxtaposes domination of the "geographic unity" of the sea as the foundation of economic and strategic power<sup>11</sup> against the superior industrial base and organizational strength of the "heartland" supported by the interior lines of railway communication.<sup>12</sup> These conflicting models have driven equally simplistic policy alternatives: the invulnerability of the Soviet Union to sea power and the necessity of a "continental commitment;" and the criticality of the destruction of the Soviet fleet and its means of support premised upon the vulnerability of that nation to both direct and indirect naval power.<sup>13</sup>

#### METHOD

The strategic approach is emphasized because it is the most enduring and least explored. Additionally, it derives from the premise that, once "resource agendas" are disposed, the fundamental cause of conflict is the absence of a conceptual structure in terms of which the efficacy of strategic approaches can be judged. For reasons of space, however, the

structural and dynamic categories of the strategic framework utilized must be simply postulated and defined.

Definition of the strategic problem embraces the structural elements of the issue. Included here are geopolitical considerations (i.e., the relationship of geography to political and military power), the strategic relationship of the antagonists, enemy doctrine, and "scenario" assumptions. Secondly, strategic purpose and approach encompasses the basic strategic concept of the "...calculation and co-ordination of the end and the means," to include the vital issue of war termination on advantageous terms.<sup>14</sup> Here, of course, is the question of the ultimate purpose of war inextricably driven, in Clausewitz's most enduring insight, by the political object.<sup>15</sup> Political, or strategic purpose, in turn shapes the nature of the means employed, or the strategic approach. The range of possibilities embraces wars of annihilation to mere observation. However, the spectrum of options in a nuclear environment is influenced by another observation: "The advantage that the destruction of the enemy possesses over all other means is balanced by its cost and danger; and it is only in order to avoid these risks that other policies are employed."<sup>16</sup> However, the utility of limited war could be highly significant in directly or indirectly attacking the foundations of enemy military power. Moreover, destruction of the enemy, with its attendant risk of unlimited war, is unnecessary when the strategic purpose is maintenance of security -- a purpose realized if the threat is removed, i.e., the enemy abandons his

purpose.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, escalation control recognizes the natural tendency of war toward the absolute. It thus demands the consonance of the risks inherent in a given strategic approach with the clearly anticipated results of its application.<sup>18</sup> For war essentially comprises a spectrum of political probabilities, and: "The closer these political probabilities drive war toward the absolute, the more the belligerent states are involved and drawn in to its vortex, the clearer appear the connections between its action, and the more imperative need not to take the first step without considering the last."<sup>19</sup> And finally, the concept in many ways unifying the foregoing is the strategic center of gravity, best described as the general focus of military effort. That focus is determined by the "...dominant characteristics of both belligerents....Out of these characteristics a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed."<sup>20</sup> In the context of the maritime-continental strategy debate, however, the "dominant characteristics" of both may be manifestly dissimilar, creating equally divergent centers of gravity the attack upon which could literally nullify the ends-means calculus noted. Consistent with the constraints of the political object and the imperative of escalation control, "all our energies" may well not be directed toward the enemy's center of gravity, but rather toward the protection of one's own "...hub of all power and movement..." from potentially decisive enemy action.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CONFLICTING ARGUMENTS: A STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

#### OVERVIEW

In terms of the strategic framework, the maritime-continental strategy debate has not resulted in the development of an appropriate defense policy. In failing to accurately define the strategic problem with respect to the Soviet Union, neither strategy provides a suitable framework in which to derive strategic purpose and approach. Thus, the primacy of the political object is negated in continental strategy through its focus on deterrence as opposed to warfighting; and it is diminished in maritime strategy through its imprecise war termination objectives. Continental strategy is thus reduced to mere military ends, while the warfighting character of maritime strategy often lacks precise direction. As a result, both seriously compromise the essential requirement of escalation control. And finally, the pivotal influence of the strategic center of gravity in shaping the nature of the war is diminished in assuming similar centers for both antagonists. As a result, continental strategy courts disaster, and maritime strategy irrelevance.

#### DEFINITION OF THE STRATEGIC PROBLEM

The continentalists contend that the central strategic problem facing the U.S. is Soviet control of the Western

European "heartland." Moreover, given enormous Soviet conventional and geographic advantages, that construct mandates a strategy in which the threat is to be deterred, or resisted, at the point of greatest concentration pending negotiation or escalation. Additionally, the secondary and supporting role of naval power in continental strategy derives from two assumptions. The first is the invulnerability of the "heartland" to seapower, which drives the conclusion that neither naval power projection nor destruction of the Soviet fleet would significantly influence force posture, deterrence, or warfighting. The second postulates a probable scenario of a Soviet blitzkrieg strategy in which naval power, with its slowly developing impact, would be inconsequential.<sup>21</sup>

Generally, the maritime approach posits the concept of the "island nation" dependent upon unfettered access to, and control of, the world's oceans as the foundations of economic and military power.<sup>22</sup> Its manifestation alternates among classic Mahanian concepts of the centrality of maritime supremacy to national greatness, sea control with limited objectives, and the significance of strategic geography, the permanence of conflict, and the dynamic threat of competing U.S.-Soviet global capabilities.<sup>23</sup> And finally, maritime strategy asserts the desirability of extended conventional war, and the significant impact of naval power therein. Consonant with its warfighting focus, naval power would not only reinforce and sustain forward deployed forces, but directly influence the course of the campaign through flank pressure, destruction of

the Soviet fleet, and power projection pursuant to war termination.<sup>24</sup>

However, certain difficulties are inherent to each. For example, in postulating a static geostrategic structure of fixed point defenses (e.g., Europe and Korea) continental strategy forfeits strategic mobility and its corollary benefits of concentration, surprise, and flexibility. Its historical analogue resembles on a larger scale the Roman Imperial defense system of linear outposts dependent upon vulnerable internal lines of communication, unreliable allies, and a potent external threat.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the maritime approach emphasizes exploitation of inherent capabilities and a rational division of strategic labor, with the seas in effect becoming "interior lines" to the peripheries of the "heartland" -- the frontier outposts of North America. But the significance of these advantages to the strategic problem of an expansionist continental power is generally undefined.

Additionally, the relative importance of sea power against a Soviet drive for Eurasian hegemony has tended to be cast in terms of its impact upon the central axis of advance. Resolution invariably suggests the "Mahan versus Mackinder" model which distorts the significance of control of the "rimlands" to both antagonists, as well as that of the "interior" position of Eurasia in relation to global lines of communication. The continentalists contend that in the final analysis land forces comprise the decisive component of combat power, and that even traditional maritime powers attained ultimate victory on



land.<sup>26</sup> Such fails to grasp the difference between a particular style of strategy and the character of its component elements, e.g., that major land campaigns are often integral to maritime strategies. On the other hand, the maritime argument relies upon three hundred years of British success in blunting Continental hegemony by a single power through a combination of maritime operations against vulnerable extremities, and limited, often decisive, land campaigns at critical junctures.<sup>27</sup> Even with respect to Germany in World War I, it has been persuasively argued that, through sea control and the blockade, naval power and the strategic indirect approach ultimately proved decisive.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, that approach was influenced by the German navy as a "fleet in being," intended to deter a Mahanian strategy by inflicting unacceptable losses and foreclosing strategic alternatives, with its own destruction being strategically inconsequential.

Germany, and earlier Spain and France, were highly vulnerable to naval power given overseas colonies and significant foreign trade. In critical respects, however, the Soviet case is manifestly different. Her highly autarkic economic structure minimizing dependance upon imported materials would reduce the utility of closing her easily blockaded ports. However, the Soviet "blue water" fleet, especially as concentrated around the Kola Peninsula, poses the analogous "fleet in being" problem. The effect of its destruction or containment would be strategically minimal for the Soviets. Yet, it is capable of deterring a decisive engagement and occupying large elements of

the U.S. fleet to the exclusion of other options. Thus, the impact of naval power is generally twofold. First is the obvious function of sustaining the land battle, essential in both maritime and continental approaches. Second is the elimination, through destruction or containment, of Soviet capabilities which threaten vital geostrategic interests (e.g., control of the Eurasian rimland, trade, raw materials).

Finally, a probable scenario remains highly speculative and more a question of desired outcome than precise assessment. However, a "bolt from the blue" Soviet invasion does not appear credible given the dynamics of military organization and doctrine, and a highly cautious and deliberative approach to military affairs. Secondly, the short war/long war argument centers upon the divergent needs of the two belligerents. Political control of Europe coupled with the imperative of conflict escalation dominance imposes the necessity of short, limited, and politically decisive conflict upon the Soviets. Concomitantly, it is desirable for the U.S. to retain the option of negating such a strategy, in turn ensuring conventionality through conflict escalation dominance.<sup>29</sup>

#### STRATEGIC PURPOSE AND APPROACH

Clausewitz noted that: "No one starts a war -- or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so -- without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it."<sup>30</sup> The first, of course, addresses war termination objectives. In that regard,

continental strategy is broadly shaped by the desire for deterrence, both conventional and nuclear. In turn, its definition of the strategic problem in which "...the Soviet Army must be countered on an equal footing..."<sup>31</sup> in the major continental theaters mandates a strategy dependent upon its ability to deter a blitzkrieg attack. In the event of failure, it vaguely envisions a short war presenting the Soviets with the prospect of an undesired longer war, forcing negotiation of the status quo ante.<sup>32</sup> Not surprisingly, the continentalists advance no meaningful political object, thus vitiating the fundamental purpose of war as well as the imperative of escalation control in not having thought through the last step.

By contrast, maritime strategy in most manifestations advances an explicitly warfighting approach, though deterrence is a first, and preferred, objective. Nonetheless, the maritime school does not develop sufficiently explicit political ends of warfighting. For example, the most aggressive effort seeks "...to bring about war termination on favorable terms."<sup>33</sup> However, strategic purpose and approach are confused in such objectives as denying the Soviets "their kind of war" by exerting global pressure, destroying the Soviet Navy, influencing the land battle, and threatening direct attack against the homeland or altering the correlation of nuclear forces.<sup>34</sup> Only the last, and destruction of the Soviet fleet approximate termination objectives, with the remainder pertaining to means.<sup>35</sup> But pursuant to what is the Soviet fleet to be destroyed? And what termination objectives could be leveraged

from a shift in the correlation of nuclear forces? Thus, while representing a significant improvement to continental strategy in recognizing the need for meaningful termination objectives, the maritime approach nonetheless labors under not having thought through the "last step," posing the prospect of war assuming its own undirected momentum.

The strategic approach of each school is largely a function of its strategic purpose. Given their focus on deterrence, and a possibly short and inconclusive war, the continentalists advocate the rapid reinforcement of the Central Front at the point of greatest enemy concentration, conceding Soviet primacy in non-European heartland areas with the lesser deterrent of a "tripwire" strategy, especially in the Persian Gulf region.<sup>36</sup> Devoid of a strategically significant political object, the resultant approach accepts a military end of warfighting, i.e., the thwarting of the enemy army in the field. If successful, and assuming conventionality, such a strategy would merely revisit the mindless attrition of Verdun and the Somme.

Maritime strategy likewise eschews victory in the conventional sense, as well as accepting an effective land engagement as a precondition of success. Consonant with its warfighting character, it would exploit the inherent flexibility of naval power across a spectrum of options, gradually escalating "limited" military objectives to create a strategic situation favorable to its elusive war termination goals. On the one hand are the highly constrained objectives of defensive sea

control, simultaneously absorbing a "first salvo," containing Soviet naval forces, and exploiting the advantages of the strategic defense to force termination at that level. At a higher level of military effort is the approach of The Maritime Strategy in which the destruction of the Soviet fleet and its means of support is completed, the correlation of nuclear forces altered, and Soviet territory seized as negotiating leverage.<sup>37</sup>

The value of the warfighting emphasis of the maritime strategic approach lies in the recognition of the need for an alternative other than engaging the enemy from a posture of extreme disadvantage, the significance of a meaningful political object to a coherent strategy, and the importance of strategic geography in shaping both strategic purpose and approach.<sup>38</sup> However, its vagaries are potentially mischievous. First is the lack of precision regarding war termination objectives noted above. Moreover, the feasibility of the predominant view of the need to destroy the Soviet fleet is dubious at best, especially in the early stages of global war. Unless fortuitously attrited in the outer oceans, or decisively engaged on favorable terms, the Soviet fleet, with a posture and function analogous to the German navy of 1914, imposes the unglamorous alternative of blockade and gradual attrition. But perhaps the most questionable feature of the more aggressive maritime approach, again related to termination objectives, is the enormous risk of forfeiting control of conflict escalation

inherent in altering the correlation of nuclear forces. Several steps have been taken without considering the last.

#### ESCALATION CONTROL

The practical realization of the political object in war is dependant upon the capacity to modulate and control the course of conflict, and thus obviate its inherent tendency toward maximum violence. Both strategies seek to impose such control. For example, a central argument of continental strategy is the inutility of tactical nuclear weapons, hence the need for a robust conventional defense at the point of principal threat to ensure escalation control by raising the risks and costs of Soviet military action.<sup>39</sup> However, consistent with the implications of the general purpose of deterrence, the continentalists argue that an aggressive maritime strategy, with its prospects of horizontal escalation and alteration of the correlation of nuclear forces, would, by attacking vital Soviet capabilities and territory, quickly escalate conflict to strategic nuclear dimensions.<sup>40</sup>

The maritimists essentially reverse the argument. They contend that an aggressive approach in fact imposes escalation control through denying the Soviet strategic preference of a short, decisive war. Moreover, it narrows strategic options through multifaceted challenges, and imposes war termination through degradation of second strike capability. Nuclear parity, and a longer and more complex war, are sufficient to establish escalation control: on NATO in response to

conventional Soviet success; and on the Soviets in response to nonnuclear attacks upon strategic capabilities or invasion of the homeland.<sup>41</sup>

The validity of both approaches centers on assumptions concerning Soviet doctrine and behavior, and the imperatives of a deterrent as opposed to a warfighting strategy. The continentalists correctly recognize that the integrated character of Soviet doctrine accommodates the possibility of the full spectrum of violence. However, the absence of a dynamic warfighting concept with appropriate termination objectives has generated an exaggerated fear of its probability. Moreover, that deficiency further diminishes escalation control through lack of a coherent framework of ends-means assessment in the event of failure. By contrast, the maritimists confront the escalatory problem more forthrightly. But their assumptions concerning Soviet behavior, while plausible, appear to minimize the enormous risks inherent in that approach. This is especially true of the final phase of the Maritime Strategy which, in attacking both the Soviet Union and its nuclear reserve, prospectively abdicates escalation control. Moreover, that possibility is exacerbated by the lack of precise termination objectives. It is both reasonable and admirable to resist intimidation by the threat of escalation. But such risks must be recognized, and proportional to clearly conceived objectives which themselves admit of modification as appropriate. In this case, the "balance of political probabilities" demands reassessment.

## STRATEGIC CENTER OF GRAVITY

The foregoing arguments of the primacy of the political object, its necessarily limited nature, and the infeasibility of either power becoming dominant in the other's sphere suggest the strategic center of gravity as the pivotal concept.<sup>42</sup> As with the other three strategic elements, however, both strategies have incompletely accommodated the issue. This is especially evident in the implicit assumption of a similarity of respective centers of gravity, each capable of being attacked by the other belligerent.

The continentalists define the Soviet center of gravity as its army which, true to Clausewitz, must be vigorously and directly confronted. For ... "it is the expansion of the Soviet Army that weighs on the overall balance of military power..." and which "...must be countered on an equal footing..."<sup>43</sup> The difficulties here are evident. In accepting the symmetry of respective centers of gravity it confronts the vortex of Soviet power from a posture of extreme disadvantage, a position easily deduced from Clausewitz untempered by the restraints of a limited political object (a complexity later addressed by Corbett). But the continentalists refuse to accept the implications of their argument. For emphasis on deterrence has led to advocacy of concentrating primary effort against the Soviet center of gravity without the necessary corollary of its destruction. Additionally, it fails both to recognize inherent differences in "hubs" of activity, or posit a more realistic concept.



Two general problems are evident in the maritime approach: the proclivity to incorrectly identify the Soviet center of gravity and then direct primary effort toward it; and a willingness to recognize divergent centers, but not expand its ramifications to the central "seapower-landpower" strategic problem. The first characterizes the aggressive approach reflected in The Maritime Strategy. This view recognizes the importance of sea control and Third World interests, but is ultimately informed by the Mahanian imperative of the destruction of the enemy fleet and its means of support as central to influencing war termination: "The need for forward movement is obvious. This is where the Soviet fleet will be, and this is where we must be prepared to fight."<sup>44</sup> But in the instant case the center of gravity is the Soviet regime and its principal implementing mechanism of the military establishment, principally the army and strategic nuclear forces. Thus, containment or destruction of the Soviet fleet, while necessary, must be conceived in terms other than diminishing vital military capability or influencing the real center of gravity. However, the aggressive maritime approach may tangentially threaten the Soviet center of gravity through the effects of successful disruption of strategic timelines and alteration of the correlation of nuclear forces on the cohesion of the regime. In either case, however, precise war termination objectives would be central to controlling inherent risks. The second avoids attempts to define and attack the Soviet center of gravity, rather concentrating on the protection of U.S.

maritime capabilities central to the projection of all military power, to include the security of strategic geography as well.<sup>45</sup> While providing the basis of further development, such lacks conceptual precision in defining the significance of the center of gravity in relation to the political object and strategic approach. In those terms, the center of gravity must comprise the "hub" of capabilities or areas critical to the protection of basic national interests and attainment of the central political object in war, and which is decisively threatened by enemy capability.

CHAPTER 3  
AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

OVERVIEW

The following approach attempts to conceptually clarify and expand the maritime-continental strategy debate in terms of the strategic framework employed. With a strategic problem of the preventing Soviet "oversetting" of the geopolitical balance, and a political object of containing Soviet strategic "breakout," the maritime capabilities of mobility, concentration, and "interior lines" are integrated with an effective land campaign to deny the goals of Soviet strategy and attain the strategic purpose. Finally, in seeking to preserve the U.S. strategic center of gravity instead of confronting the Soviets from a posture of extreme disadvantage, this approach harmonizes political ends with military means. Overall strategic posture is thus improved.

DEFINITION OF THE STRATEGIC PROBLEM

Central to the definition of the strategic problem is the impact of strategic geography which, as Colin Gray has noted, comprises "...the most fundamental factor in the foreign policy of states because it is the most permanent."<sup>46</sup> The U.S. possesses the size and indigenous resources of a classic "heartland." But strategically, it is a maritime nation, absent contiguous continental threats, with significant dependent

foreign trade, and requiring military power to project and sustain itself across the world's oceans. While not as dependent upon the seas as was Britain, the absence of an empire makes the task more difficult. For open access must be maintained while simultaneously preventing its denial by others. This is in no degree altered by the forward posturing of major land forces, or the necessity of major land campaigns in global war. The remaining element of the strategic problem, moreover, is the Soviet Union's attempt to alter that strategic geography by "oversetting" the balance of global power through control of the Eurasian rimlands and the narrow seas. The consequences of such were prophesied by Mackinder:

The oversetting of the balance of power in favour of the pivot state, resulting in its expansion over the marginal lands of Euro-Asia, would permit the use of vast continental resources for fleet building, and the empire of the world would be in sight.

The strategic problem, then, is a variant of the historic British goal of preventing Continental hegemony by a single power. It embraces the requirement to project and sustain military power, control maritime challenges, and secure the Eurasian rimlands and adjacent seas (e.g., Western Europe, the North Flank, the Mediterranean littoral, Japan, and South Korea) to prevent the strategic "breakout" of the Soviet Union into the open oceans. "The most important single fact in the American security situation is the question of who controls the rimlands of Europe and Asia. Should these get into the hands of a single power or combination of powers hostile to the

United States, the resulting encirclement would put us in a position of grave peril, regardless of the size of our army and navy."<sup>48</sup>

#### STRATEGIC PURPOSE AND APPROACH

Attainment of a strategic posture more advantageous than not having gone to war requires the positive control or containment of those areas or Soviet capabilities which mortally threaten U.S. vital interests. That includes containing Soviet "strategic breakout" from the heartland into the global seas by the control of the rimlands, and containing or destroying relevant capabilities. In a word, containment of the Soviet Army sufficient to retain control of the rimlands, the containment or destruction of the principal elements of the fleet, and the elimination of Soviet overseas bases and "strategic outposts" (i.e., clients) would return the Soviet Union to its historic (and "natural") status as the preeminent Continental power.

It is significant, however, that the above political object is classically "limited." It does not envision the Soviet Union's military defeat, or the destabilization of the regime or the social and economic order. Rather, it seeks to truncate the posture and capabilities strategically threatening to the U.S., but which are peripheral to dominant Soviet interests. But since escalatory risks are evident, a range of subsequent possibilities must be thought through to conclusion: e.g.; advantageous adjustment of the inter-German border;

realignment of the Warsaw Pact; and other political or territorial adjustments such as acquisition of a permanent advanced base in the North Cape region (e.g., Bear Island). It is in terms of such possibilities that alteration of the correlation of nuclear forces could have utility.

The resultant strategic approach avoids directly confronting the Soviet center of gravity. Moreover, its success depends upon its integrated naval/land character, best illustrated in the relationship between the Northern Flank ("maritime") and the Central Front ("continental"). For the former is arguably the decisive area with respect to the U.S. center of gravity. Its significance is central to U.S. global maritime access and security, as well as to Soviet attainment of global strategic "breakout" and envelopment of the Central Front given the highly compressed distances to the open ocean. Soviet envelopment of all of Western Europe would be immediately decisive with regard to the Central Front, with subsequent "breakout" threatening SLOC interdiction and the blockade of North America. Moreover, success along the Baltic axis (e.g., capture of Jutland) would enhance the already formidable Soviet land and air advantage in providing a supporting naval flank. It is critical to note, however, that the its significance lies not in Soviet vulnerability to direct seapower, but the extent to which its control attains the political object of righting the geopolitical balance. Any diversion of Soviet military resources is a welcome, but unanticipated, benefit.

As with Britain's successful "maritime" wars against Continental adversaries, an effective land campaign is essential. The operational purpose of that campaign should not be the quixotic declaratory objective of defense of the German border which, in continental strategy, comprises the central end of deterrence/warfighting. Rather, in a broader context its purpose should be a successful strategic holding operation releasing critical capabilities to concentrate on the basic strategic purpose. Success at the German border consistent with that purpose is, of course, desirable. But the overriding purpose of the land campaign is to preserve the Western European rimland, especially Jutland and Low Countries, and deny the Soviets a decisive short-war victory. In those terms, its warfighting objective is simply not to lose.

The naval component focuses on a phased sequence of critical related tasks. An illustrative sequence includes, first, the reinforcement of the land campaign through movement of troops and sustaining support. Next is SLOC security to critical resource areas through clearing the outer oceans of Soviet fleet elements, especially submarines. Concomitantly, fleet elements and landing forces are forward postured to avoid maldeployment relative to the strategic purpose. A Marine brigade and allied air and ground forces are positioned in north Norway for ground defense and support of the naval campaign. A compositied Marine Amphibious Force preemptively occupies Jutland to support the Central Front battle, and provide theater air defense and a Baltic naval flank. West

Coast amphibious forces and the Indian Ocean Maritime Prepositioning squadron composite as a strategic reserve in the U.K. Concomitantly, submarine forces and SAGs begin barrier operations as far forward as feasible, supported by Norway-based air and ground forces. A carrier battle force provides air defense of the naval campaign there, as well as support of the Jutland landing operation from a swing position in the southern Norwegian/North Sea area. The mobility, concentration, and flexibility of sea and landing operations thus combine with a precisely defined land campaign to realize the strategic purpose.

Moreover, subsequent evolution is not prescriptive. The dynamics of the war could lead to termination at this stage, or escalate to the level envisioned in the The Maritime Strategy. But the issue of the level of military effort does not require definitive resolution for conceptual purposes. Typically, it is posed in such dichotomies as deterrence versus warfighting, and sea control versus full-forward pressure. But as a dynamic scale of effort, its application in specific circumstances will depend upon capabilities and the imperatives of the political object. However, containment is likely to be the dominant approach in the early stages, despite the utility of an aggressive "rollback" tactic to blunt establishment of advanced bases on the west coast of Norway and projection into the Atlantic and North Sea. But at some point attrition will likely vitiate further advance until the strategic situation generates more aggressive options consonant with the political object. That



condition is dependent upon significant alteration in the correlation of conventional forces, most likely through effective submarine and surface campaigns, and major landing operations against the power projection infrastructure later in the conflict (e.g., Jutland, North Norway, and the Kola). Pending a fortuitous "Trafalgar," the U.S. fleet, like the Royal Navy in the Great War, will probably be consigned to the role of jailer, at least in the early stages of a protracted war. A Mahanian result would be clearly desirable, though, given the flexibility accruing to U.S. operations from the rapid destruction of the main Soviet fleet.

#### ESCALATION CONTROL

The frictions inherent in a warfighting strategic approach could potentially disrupt the essential element of escalation control. Indeed, U.S. strategic options comprise a Hobson's choice between conceding the geopolitical initiative through isolationism and following the powder trail to absolute war on the Eurasian rimlands. Risks are unavoidable, though the current approach attempts to minimize the more obvious ones through the classically limited nature of its political object. The danger, rather, inheres in the indirect consequences of a successful strategy as noted in the discussion of strategic purpose above. The problem thus becomes one of preventing a level of violence dissonant with the political object.

## STRATEGIC CENTER OF GRAVITY

The structure of the strategic problem, as well as the strategic purpose and approach are predicated upon a redefined concept of the strategic center of gravity noted in the previous chapter: "...the hub of capabilities or areas critical to the protection of basic national interests and attainment of the central political object in war, and which is decisively threatened by enemy capability." Moreover, the respective centers of the U.S. and Soviet Union are dissimilar, in the case of the former comprising the critical rimlands and narrow seas of Eurasia, and the nexus of global lines of communication with capabilities pertinent to their security. Additionally, the realities of power, accessibility, the nature of respective military capabilities, and the necessity of a limited political object negate a direct attack on that of the Soviet Union. Thus, Corbett's imperative of the harmonization of land and sea power is attained through a strategic purpose and approach of protecting one's own center of gravity against the "over-setting" of the strategic balance. Conceptually, therefore, the nature of the conflict then can be correctly assessed, and its conduct adjusted accordingly:

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish...the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The ramifications of the foregoing are manifold and extensive. In the instant case, further conceptual development is needed to evolve a more comprehensive framework in which to evaluate strategic options. That process should also further development of a strategic doctrine, in its broader and more positive sense of an ordering mechanism, to assist defense policy-making. Also required is more expansive treatment of the interplay of nuclear weapons, an illustrative example from the Pacific and the relationship of that theater to the Atlantic in global war, and further refinement of war termination objectives.

The above approach emphasizes strategic mobility, surprise, flexibility, and phased operations on a global scale. It demands a balanced capability for sufficient engagement on the rimlands, protection of interior lines of communication and access to critical resources, and the preservation of the strategic center of gravity across the full spectrum of military effort. The implications are manifold. Policy initiatives should include deriving a meaningful division of labor among the NATO allies, especially assumption of primary responsibility for the Central Front by the Europeans. In Asia, such would include expanded air defense and maritime roles for the Japanese. Extreme global demands on attenuated U.S. capabilities demand no less. Moreover, foreign policy must accommodate

the strategic purpose of containing "breakout" with respect to basing rights, maritime and geographic prepositioning assets, and rights of force employment from foreign territory. In the most extreme case, restructuring NATO in terms of a truly "rimland" alliance should be considered.

Additionally, force development implications require comprehensive and balanced capabilities heretofore the victim of antiquated strategic assumptions and undisciplined Service agendas. Generally, they should emphasize strategic mobility, global flexibility, and embody the full range of military effort. Naval force development, for example, must reevaluate the concept of the aircraft carrier as an instrument of meaningful power projection. While some utility is evident, the general proposition is not convincing. Rather, historical experience suggests the efficacy of carriers against the enemy fleet, the land based air threat to the maritime campaign, and in support of landing operations. It is in fact the latter which provides the most significant naval power projection capability, and which should be most fully developed for that function; e.g., the expansion of amphibious lift, maritime prepositioning, general sea lift capability, and the full panoply of strategically and tactically mobile assault capabilities for the Marine Corps. Also required is the full spectrum of fleet capabilities, including the ability to sail in harm's way. Improvements include expanded numbers of submarines, with a "low" mix of diesel-electrics, mine warfare capabilities, and diversified antisurface and antisubmarine

capabilities (e.g., DDG-51s). Furthermore, general purpose ground forces require enhanced global flexibility to include extreme climatic and special operations capabilities, with those heavy divisions not forward postured in NATO or Korea deactivated to the reserves or National Guard. Strategic logistics and mobilization for protracted war, instead of fixed forward posturing, should become the first priority of the Army.

Then, hopefully, the synergism of strategy and force development will fulfill Francis Bacon's prophesy of putting "...those that be strongest by land....in great straits."<sup>50</sup>

## NOTES

1. Winston S. Churchill, The World Crisis, 1911-1918, Vol. II (London: Odham Press, 1938), pp. 971-73.
2. Alva M. Bowen, "The Anglo-German and Soviet-American Rivalries -- Some Comparisons," Paul J. Murray, ed., Naval Power in Soviet Policy (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), pp. 57-66. Also see Norman Friedman, "The Maritime Strategy and the Central Front," Unpublished paper delivered to the Conference on Maritime Strategy: Issues and Perspectives, Naval War College, Newport, R.I., 15-17 May 1985, p.1.
3. Julian Corbett, Some Principles of Maritime Strategy (London: Longman's Green and Co., 1911. Reprinted by AMS Press, New York, 1972), p.38.
4. B. H. Liddell Hart, The British Way in Warfare (London: Faber & Faber, 1932), p.41. Also see pp. 17-38 for the development of "traditional" maritime strategy, and pp. 93-114 for the evolution of the "principles" of that strategy, later expanded in Strategy (New York: Praeger, 1954) as the "indirect approach."
5. Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America (New York: Free Press, 1984), chapters 10-13.
6. Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1973), p.311. The contrast is developed in chapters 13 and 14.
7. See Keith Dunn and William Staudenmaier, The Strategic Implications of the Continental-Maritime Strategy Debate, Washington Paper #107 (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1984), p. 3; Caspar W. Weinberger, Annual Report to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1987 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), pp. 14, 32-37, 51; Jeffrey Record, "Jousting With Unreality: Reagan's Military Strategy," International Security, Winter 1983-84, p. 10; Joint Chiefs of Staff, United States Military Posture, Fiscal Year 1987, p. 47; and Jeffrey Record, Revising U.S. Military Strategy: Tailoring Means to Ends (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1984), pp. 52-55.
8. Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 127. The point relates to the author's distinction between preparations for war and the

conduct of war proper. Also see Record, Revising U.S. Military Strategy, pp. 2-3.

9. A reasonably objective juxtaposition of the general arguments is difficult to find. However, see Michael Vlahos, "Maritime Strategy versus Continental Commitment?," Orbis, Fall 1982, p.586, and Dunn and Staudenmaier, pp.4-7.

10. The "Mahan versus Mackinder" construct has been given currency by Paul M. Kennedy who has argued for the diminished efficacy of sea power against highly organized and industrially advanced continental powers. See especially his Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery (New York: Scribners, 1976), pp.xvi-xvii, and pp. 179-202, as well as "Mahan versus Mackinder: Two Interpretations of British Sea Power," in Strategy and Diplomacy, 1870-1945 (London: Fontana, 1983), pp.43-85. The most vocal contemporary continentalist, Robert W. Komer, for example, draws considerable sustenance from Kennedy in his Maritime Strategy or Coalition Defense (Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Books, 1984), pp. 39-50. By contrast, the same corpus of history and theory drives substantially different conclusions in Colin Gray's Maritime Strategy, Geopolitics, and the Defense of the West (New York: Ramapo Press, 1986).

11. Alfred T. Mahan, The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957, first published in 1890), pp.1-76. More useful commentaries are available in Margaret Sprout's essay in Edward Meade Earle, ed., Makers of Modern Strategy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943; reprint ed., 1971) pp. 415-445, and that of Philip Crowl in the 1986 edition of the same title edited by Peter Paret, pp. 444-477.

12. Halford J. Mackinder, "The Geographic Pivot of History," Geographical Journal, XXIII (1904), reprinted in Democratic Ideals and Reality (New York: Norton, 1962), pp. 259-64. The contemporary application of geopolitical thinking is due largely to the efforts of Colin Gray. See note 10 above, as well as his earlier Geopolitics of the Nuclear Era: Heartland, Rimlands, and the Technological Revolution (New York: Crane, Russak & Co., Inc., 1977).

13. See Kennedy, "Mahan versus Mackinder," p. 75; Michael Howard, "The British Way in Warfare: A Reappraisal" in his Causes of Wars and other Essays (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1983), pp. 189-207, essentially a rebuttal of Liddell Hart and Corbett, and The Continental Commitment (London: Temple Smith, 1972); and G.S. Graham, The Politics of Naval Supremacy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p.8.

14. Liddell Hart, Strategy, pp. 335-6.

15. Clausewitz, pp. 87, 584. However, his "political objective" is dropped in favor of Liddell Hart's "political object," the latter connoting broader policy ends as opposed to tactical implications.
16. Clausewitz, p. 97.
17. Corbett, pp. 54-6, 87ff. One of Corbett's most enduring contributions was assessing the relevance of Clausewitz to maritime strategy.
18. Clausewitz, p. 77.
19. Ibid., p. 584.
20. Ibid., pp. 595-6.
21. The general imperviousness of the "heartland" to sea power, the criticality of forward defense, and coalitionism may be followed in Robert W. Komer, "Maritime Strategy vs. Coalition Defense," Foreign Affairs, Summer 1982, pp. 1124-32, 1133-34, and 1144, later expanded in Maritime Strategy or Coalition Defense. However, the most vigorous and unabashed advocate of the primacy of land power and the strictly secondary and supporting role of naval forces is Edward Luttwak, The Pentagon and the Art of War (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), pp. 255-56, and 236: "Thus the role of the Navy in resisting any major Soviet action in any major theater of war is likely to be marginal unless really heroic assumptions are made." Also see John M. Collins, "Comment and Discussion," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, March, 1986, pp. 18-22 (hereafter cited as Proceedings), as well as by John Mearsheimer, "The Maritime Strategy and Conventional Deterrence," Unpublished paper delivered to the Conference on Maritime Strategy: Issues and Perspectives, Naval War College, Newport, R.I., 15-17 May 1985, who develops the assumption of the blitzkrieg scenario.
22. See the Secretary of the Navy's testimony: U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Sea Power and Force Projection, Department of Defense Authorization For Appropriations For Fiscal Year 1985, Hearings (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1984), p. 3852; John F. Lehman, Jr., "Rebirth of a U.S. Naval Strategy," Strategic Review, Summer 1981, pp. 9-15, as well as Admiral James D. Watkins, The Maritime Strategy, supplement to the Proceedings, January, 1986, p. 4.
23. Especially see Lehman, "Rebirth of a U.S. Naval Strategy," pp. 10-12, and the Maritime Strategy for the first; for the second Stansfield Turner and George Thibault, "Preparing for the Unexpected: The Need for a New Military Strategy," Foreign Affairs, Fall 1982, pp. 124-27; and for the third,



Colin Gray, "Maritime Strategy," Proceedings, February, 1986, pp. 36-37.

24. In addition to Lehman, Gray, and the Maritime Strategy, see Francis J. West, "Maritime Strategy and NATO Deterrence," Naval War College Review, September-October 1985, p. 18; and William V. Kennedy and S. Michael de Gyurky, "An Alternative Strategy for the 80's," National Defense, July-August 1983, pp. 51-52 for an extreme statement of a countervailing strategy of Northwest Pacific operations as a means of blunting a Soviet Central Front attack. See Turner and Thibault for a cautionary note regarding the efficacy of naval power projection against the Soviet Union, and, with Robert Wood and John Hanley, "The Maritime Role in the North Atlantic," Naval War College Review, November-December 1985, p. 5, the greater utility of sea control. The most explicit statement of a strict "division of labor" approach to allied cooperation is Record, Revising U.S. Military Strategy, pp. 57-73. The relative decline in the strategic importance of Europe and the concomitantly greater importance of the maritime flanks is forcefully argued in Eliot Cohen's "Do We Still Need Europe?," Commentary, January, 1986, pp. 34-35.

25. See Luttwak's The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 80-126. In many respects this work shapes Luttwak's fundamental views of the current debate.

26. See Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery; Howard, "The British Way in Warfare: A Reappraisal;" and Komer, Maritime Strategy or Coalition Defense.

27. Liddell Hart, The British Way in Warfare, pp. 25-38.

28. Richard Hough, The Great War at Sea, 1914-1918 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 321; Liddell Hart, The Real War, 1914-1918 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964; first published in 1930), pp. 471-76; and Lord Hankey, The Supreme Command, II (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961), p. 850 for the significance of removing German allies. Liddell Hart further argues that in World War II Germany was highly vulnerable to naval power, especially the threat of large scale amphibious operations: "Marines and Strategy," Marine Corps Gazette, July, 1960.

29. Norman Friedman, "Maritime Strategy and the Central Front." While consideration of Soviet strategy is beyond the scope of this discussion, particularly informative is Philip A. Petersen and John G. Hines, "The Conventional Offensive in Soviet Theater Strategy," Orbis, Fall 1983, pp. 695-739.

30. Clausewitz, p. 579.

31. Luttwak, The Pentagon and the Art of War, p. 256.
32. In addition to Luttwak, see Komer, "Maritime Strategy vs. Coalition Defense," pp. 1137-41; Dunn and Staudenmeier, pp. 14-15; and, for an articulate argument for the concept of deterrence, John Mearsheimer, "The Maritime Strategy and Conventional Deterrence," pp. 25-28; and Stephen Van Evera and Barry Posen, "Defense Policy and the Reagan Administration: Departure from Containment," International Security, Summer 1983, pp. 3-45.
33. Watkins, The Maritime Strategy, p. 13.
34. Ibid., p. 14. Also see Norman Friedman, "U.S. Maritime Strategy," International Defense Review, July 1985, p. 1075.
35. Colin Gray's geopolitical perspective has suggested some more explicit war termination objectives in focusing upon mutually threatening capabilities, the problem of "strategic breakout," and preservation of the rimlands in forestalling Mackinder's prophecy. See "Maritime Strategy," pp. 36-38; and Maritime Strategy, Geopolitics, and the Defense of the West, chapters 2 and 3.
36. See note 32 above.
37. See Friedman, "Maritime Strategy and the Central Front;" the three phases of The Maritime Strategy, pp. 9-13, especially Phase III; and Turner and Thibault, pp. 124-33 for an emphasis on sea control, global interests, and their significance for the land battle.
38. Gray, "Maritime Strategy," pp. 39-40 argues the need to sustain NATO as a critical rimland.
39. Komer, "Maritime Strategy vs. Coalition Defense," pp. 1127-28.
40. Mearsheimer, "The Maritime Strategy and Conventional Deterrence," pp. 9-16; Van Evera and Posen, p. 33; and Collins, "Comment and Discussion," Proceedings, March 1986, pp. 18-22,
41. See the Secretary of the Navy's Senate testimony; Friedman, "The Maritime Strategy and the Central Front," pp. 6-11; and West, p. 18.
42. Theoretically, the most coherent concept is that of Clausewitz: "...the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends..." and which constitutes the main focus of military effort (pp. 595-96). A more elusive, but promising concept is that implied in Liddell Hart's idea of the center of gravity as enemy cohesion deriving from dislocation as the principal aim of battle (Strategy, p. 339). A

far more specific notion is that of Mahan, contending that command of the sea is most effectively attained through the primacy of the battlefleet and the destruction of the enemy's (pp. 26-28, 121). That view is balanced in maritime thinking by Corbett's reading of Clausewitz's theory of limited objectives, driving a concept of control and denial in a "countervalue" strategy against the economic and social fabric of the enemy (pp. 47-56, and 89-90). But generally the maritime-continental strategy debate has suffered from their inappropriate or incomplete application. For example, Clausewitz's dictum of focusing maximum effort on the enemy center of gravity is both easily uncoupled from its clear connection to an extreme level of violence and, more importantly, assumes a similarity of respective centers of gravity, each capable of being attacked by the other belligerent. As suggested previously, the necessity of limited political object coupled with manifestly different strategic imperatives would render such a proposition situational at best. The same obtains with respect to Mahan: is the enemy's battlefleet in reality his center of gravity? As noted, the concept of destruction of cohesion is promising, but, in the current context, could easily diminish the efficacy of the limited political object espoused by its author. And while similar centers of gravity are not as unequivocal in Corbett, at least the vulnerability of the enemy to sea power properly applied is assumed. But Corbett does propose a more limited concept of the center of gravity, suggesting that the preservation of one's own -- in this case the vital nexus of sea lines of communication -- is a proper application of the principle.

43. Luttwak, The Pentagon and the Art of War, pp. 255-56; and Komer, "Maritime Strategy vs. Coalition Defense," pp. 1133-34.

44. Watkins, The Maritime Strategy. p. 9; and Friedman, "U.S. Maritime Strategy," p. 1075.

45. Gray, Maritime Strategy, Geopolitics, and the Defense of the West, chapter 3.

46. Gray, The Geopolitics of the Nuclear Era, p. 1.

47. Mackinder, p. 262.

48. Nicholas Spykman, The Geography of the Peace (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944), p. x, from the introduction by Frederick S. Dunn;

49. Clausewitz, pp. 88-89.

50. Quoted in Corbett, p. 55.

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