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The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

PREFACE

This IDA Document is one of a set of six such publications written in support of an IDA study sponsored by the Deputy Director for Naval Warfare within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition and Technology), Strategic and Tactical Systems.

The central activity of Phase I of the study was an all-day meeting by a panel of nationally known experts, civilian and formerly military. The panel brought their knowledge and experience to bear upon the question of whether the nation should develop a modern naval mining capability. The Documents were prepared as short working papers to assist the panel as it developed its position on the issue.

CULTURAL AND ETHICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE NAVY'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS NAVAL MININING

The historic record of Anglo-Saxon navies displays a clear pattern of reluctant support for the development and maintenance of naval mines in times of peace balanced by a pragmatic acceptance of their military utility in times of war. This is not to say that navies pointedly reject naval mines and stubbornly refuse to develop them in peace time; rather, it means that navies fail to show for mines the same dedicated preference they constantly display for other weapon systems. In fact, with the exception of the development of the CAPTOR mine during the 1960s, most of the post-World War II period was characterized by near starvation funding for naval mine development programs, while the period between the two World Wars was essentially devoid of any mine development. And yet, the nation did not fail to quickly recognize the extraordinary military utility of naval mining when war circumstances required their use, as the famous *North Sea Barrage* mining operation of World War I and *Operation Starvation* of World War II amply demonstrate.

The steady character of this pattern throughout history bespeaks an equally steady reason for its existence. We shall argue in what follows that the fundamental reasons behind the attitude displayed by the Navy towards mining are both cultural and ethical. There is something about being an American naval officer that predisposes one to viewing naval mines as both unfit for the kind of war that we would prefer to fight and uncharacteristic of the kind of people we like to think we are. Americans at war tend to use overwhelming force to achieve swift and unconditional victory over the enemy, and mining ill fits this instinct. American naval officers are trained in the Mahanian school of complete and unchallenged control of the sea, and the naval mine, primarily a sea denial weapon, does little to further that strategic goal. And in any event, mines are the weapon of choice for weak nations lacking the courage to risk their own forces in the valiant pursuit of victory.

1. The American Way of War

Americans fight war unlike any other nation. Far from the von Clausewitz view that war is an instrument of policy, Americans consider war to be a failure of policy; war and peace are to an American diametrically opposite states of affairs. During war the determining objective is to obtain a clear-cut, definitive military victory in the most effective manner as quickly as possible; but when peace returns, the determining objective is to get rid of the instruments of victory and to return to normal life as soon as possible. The instantaneous manner in which the United States returned home from the great war in complete disregard for the political consequences such an action would have upon the balance of power left behind goes a long way toward explaining why the free world had to spend 50 more years of hardship and privation before it could secure the blessings of freedom for which it fought that war.

This dissociation of military power and national policy in the American approach to war arises, in the first place, from a profound moral and emotional aversion to violence. This aversion springs from the great liberal and humane ideals of the Enlightenment which emphasize man's ability to resolve conflicts by peaceful settlement, by impartial reference to reason, law, and morality. As Henry Kissinger says:

> As a nation, we have used power almost shamefacedly, as if it were inherently wicked. We have wanted to be liked for our own sakes, and we have wished to succeed because of the persuasiveness of our principles rather than through our strength.

The American aversion to violence in international relations tends to inhibit indulgence in the enormous evil of war for no more than the limited, prosaic ends of national policy. War looked at in this way strikes Americans as cynical and ignoble, and therefore, any restraint upon the maximum military effort for the sake of some limited objective is unacceptable. For the price of human life, a commodity Americans value so very highly, only unlimited war aimed at swift, total victory over the enemy appears to make sense.

The other reason for the dissociation of power and policy that characterizes American war is the American's strong streak of pugnacity. This pugnacity is a romantic impulse that, in response to provocation, molds American boldness and initiative into patriotism. As George Kennan observed, it springs from a righteous indignation at the need to undertake war:

> Democracy fights in anger -- it fights for the very reason that it was forced to go to war. It fights to punish the power that was rash enough and hostile enough to provoke it – to teach that power a lesson it will not forget, to prevent the thing from happening again. It looks as though the real source of the emotional fervor which Americans are able to put into a war lies less in any objective understanding of the wider issues involved than in a profound irritation over the fact that other people have finally provoked us to the point where we had no alternative but to take up arms.

Pugnacity and hatred of war are generally fused into one emotional entity that gives the American way of war its characteristic preoccupation with military operations and its contempt for solutions short of victory. In his 1951 congressional testimony, General Douglas MacArthur stressed both his profound hatred of war:

> I believe the enormous sacrifices that have been brought about by the scientific methods of killing have rendered war a fantastic solution of international difficulties. It is a form of mutual suicide; and I believe that the entire effort of modern society should be concentrated on an endeavor to outlaw war as a method of solution of problems between nations.

as well as his conviction that war should be fought all-out to a clear victory:

> To me, the concept that when you use force, you can limit that force, would mean that you would have a continued and indefinite extension of bloodshed, which would have a limitless end. You would not have the potentialities of destroying the enemy's military power and bringing the conflict to a decisive close in the minimum of time and with minimum of loss.

Against this background, mine warfare, with its plodding, ambiguous, and ultimately uncontrollable character, rarely suggest itself to an American. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the U.S. Navy, manned as it is with American personnel, does not appear inclined to put the same emotional commitment in developing mines that it routinely puts in developing weapons designed to obliterate the enemy in a swift and controlled manner.

On the other hand, Americans are every bit as pragmatic as they are pugnacious. Naval mines, which are abhorrent to their pugnacity in time of peace, would, and often have, fit their pragmatism in time of war. In fact, the history of American wars amply supports the proposition that, while they are slow to think mines in time of peace, Americans are quick to use them when the exigencies of war demands it.

2. Mahan's Influence Upon the U.S. Navy

According to Alfred Thayer Mahan, the father of American naval strategy, the purpose of that strategy is to gain control of the sea. Control of the sea would confer upon the nation possessing it unchallenged domination over maritime communications. Indeed, Mahan believed that everything might have been different in the struggle between Rome and Carthage if Carthage had controlled communications across the Mediterranean and Hannibal could have gone directly to Italy by sea instead of using the long land route through Spain.

To control the sea in war it is necessary first to destroy the enemy's fleet. Once the enemy fleet is destroyed, the victorious navy can exploit the resulting control of the sea for any further purpose that it desires. In particular, having gained control of the sea, a navy can advance its nation's economic power by keeping open its access to the resources of the world, while correspondingly strangling the enemy economy by depriving it of such access:

> It is not the taking of individual ships or convoys, be they few or many, that strikes down the money power of a nation; it is the possession of that overbearing power on the sea which drives the enemy's flag from it, or allows it to appear only as a fugitive; and which, by controlling the great common, closes the highways by which commerce moves to and from the enemy's shores. This overbearing power can only be exercised by great navies.

Following the Napoleonic model of warfare, Mahan believed that the essential decision in war could be achieved quickly, in a dramatic Austerlitz-like battle on the sea, where the opposing fleets would determine which of them should control the sea. To ensure that his nation's fleet would win the battle for control of the sea, Mahan worked hard to enlarge the American Navy as well as to transform it from a commerce-raiding navy into a battleship navy. This navy, he believed, would have to operate as a concentrated force aimed at challenging the corresponding fleet of the enemy for control of the sea.

Unfortunately, technological developments occurring while Mahan wrote his books were making it possible for a battle fleet to destroy the enemy's battle fleet in a concentrated confrontation for control of the sea and yet not be able to fully exercise that control. These developments included the explosive floating mine, its offspring, the self-propelled torpedo, and a new instrument for carrying the torpedo, the submarine. With

these devices a defeated navy might render the waters adjacent to its own coast so precarious that control of the sea might be diluted beyond meaning.

These newly introduced instruments of war strongly supported the arguments of the French *jeune ecole,* which emphasized the advantages of commerce raiding over control of the sea. Mahan, who contemptuously brushed aside the possibilities of a strategy of commerce raiding, failed to realize and subsequently integrate the new technological possibilities into his theory. To him, the naval mine, the torpedo, and the submarine were nothing more than a few irritating counter-examples to the general validity of his views. For a man pursuing the great project of sea control through fleet dominance, mines, which denied that control, could only appear as undesirable objects of resistance.

The Royal Navy, upon the history of which Mahan erected his theory of sea control, instinctively shared his views. After Fulton tested the naval mine at Prime Minister Pitt's request, Lord St. Vincent, the First Sea Lord, famously summarized the Anglo-Saxon reaction to naval mining

> Pitt was the greatest fool that ever existed to encourage a mode of warfare that those who command the seas did not want, and which, if successful, would deprive them of it.

Despite the fact that mine and submarine warfare have long since come of age, these words still reverberate in the hearts of the American Navy. Mines continue to sit like a serpent at the heart of the Mahanian theory and the U.S. Navy, still focused as it is on sea control through sea power, is bound to have a negative view of mines.

3. The Ethics of War

It has often been said that naval mines are despicable weapons that no civilized nation would countenance using. They hide under the surface of the ocean, poised to attack friend and foe alike without warning and without mercy; mining appears to us Americans to be an underhanded way of fighting, on a par with terrorism.

One root of these feelings can be traced back to the days when warfare was a valiant undertaking pitting the courage and ingenuity of one man against that of another. Just as the development of long-range weapons had done in the 18th century, the introduction of mines as a weapon of war has greatly irritated these deep-seated notions of how a fighting man ought to behave. Miners that attack enemy shipping, being far

away from the scene of action, are safe from direct retaliation, a fact that runs contrary to all the notions of courage and muscular prowess that inflamed the hearts of military men throughout the ages. In some historic sense, we believe that it is wrong to employ weapons that asymmetrically affect the warring factions; perhaps the only to morally justify taking the life of another human being in the heat of battle is to endanger one's life in the process.

Beyond this profoundly human reaction to the lack of valor inherent in mining, the American attitude towards mines in general, and naval mines in particular, is strongly colored by the indiscriminate character of mine warfare. Once laid, mines, unlike weapons under the direct control of a human being, will not try to spare the lives of the noncombatant but will kill anything and anybody crossing their area of coverage both during and well beyond the duration of the conflict. This feature of mine warfare produced many unintended casualties after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 and led to the Hague Convention of 1907 in which England tried unsuccessfully to outlaw naval mines; due to Russian and German opposition, the Convention only succeeded in limiting their use.

While innocent people do get killed during times of war, that is never our intention; we reluctantly accept such casualties as an accident inherent in the stochastic character of war. The use of weapons that deliberately ignore the moral imperative of protecting the lives of the civilian population is therefore ethically unacceptable to us.

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This document explores the cultural and ethical reasons why the U.S. Navy has always been reluctant to develop and acquire naval mines during periods of peace but has stood ready to use them extensively in time of war.

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