

## CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF INDIAN NAVAL STRATEGY (or How 'Mahanian' are We?)

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Most Western observers feel that Indian maritime thinking, and, more recently, Chinese maritime thinking, too, is dominated by the ideas of Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan. In an event organised by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (a London-based think tank), one observer felt that whenever he "*prodded a military man from India or China, out leapt a Mahanite*".<sup>1</sup> A US Navy officer remarked on the side-lines of a Track II event at the National Maritime Foundation that Mahan is probably "*more revered and more widely read in India than he is back home*". It is likely that a Russian officer would similarly opine that Indian maritime thought has been largely influenced by the thoughts of Admiral Sergey Georgyevich Gorshkov. To some degree, both would be right, but to a larger extent, both would be wrong.

There is little doubt that insofar as the force structure and 'blue water' leanings of the Indian Navy are concerned; these have been influenced by Mahanian ideas. On the other hand, the basic operational philosophy, tactics, and deployment of the IN have, almost certainly been influenced far more by Sir Julian Corbett. This may, at least in part, be due to the Indian Navy having inherited its organisational structures, work culture, traditions, and consequently, even its mindset, from the Royal Navy, at the time of Independence. This mindset evolved over the years not only to better suit the Indian requirements but also thanks to the infusion of Soviet maritime thinking. The process of absorbing several aspects of the erstwhile-Soviet Navy's operating philosophy into Indian thought processes was only natural, as a major part of the Indian Navy's inventory originated in the Soviet Union. The Indian Navy also had its officers deputed to the Soviet Union for prolonged durations, for training courses, procurements, and refits and modernisation of its warships, aircraft, and submarines.

It is true that Indian maritime 'think tanks' quote Mahan more freely than they do many other thinkers. This may have something to do simply with ease of access. At least in the 'pre-Internet' era, getting one's hands on translated works outlining the ideas of the Russian Admiral Gorshkov, the French Admiral Raoul Castex, or even the German Admiral Wolfgang Wegener, would have been difficult. Mahan's works (and also numerous independent works about his ideas) were far more commonly available. Even today, the US Navy and think-tanks put out more material in the public domain than

<sup>1</sup> This was quoted in *Chasing ghosts: The notion that geography is power is making an unwelcome comeback in Asia*, an article published on 11 June 2009 in Asia section of the Economist under the headline "Chasing ghosts", <http://www.economist.com/node/13825154>. Several commentators have also evaluated the comment and whilst some have agreed with it, others have pointed out that emphasis on geography was always the case in the Asian mindset. See also C. Raja Mohan, "Maritime Power: India and China turn to Mahan", *ISAS Working Paper No. 71*, 07 July 2009. <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/103981/70.pdf>

any other country. When an Indian writer, in the formative years of the Indian Navy, needed quotes from well-known strategists to provide intellectual backing to his ideas, he turned to the most accessible sources. Mahan was thus not only quoted freely but also often misquoted, too!<sup>2</sup> As an example, we have the almost ubiquitous statement wrongly attributed to Mahan:

*“Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. This ocean is the key to the seven seas in the 21st century. The destiny of the world will be decided in these waters.”*<sup>3</sup>

The prediction is probably true, and Admiral Mahan, if he had been around to hear this statement, would probably have rued the fact that he had not gazed long enough into the future to have predicted this! The ‘quote’, to put it quite bluntly, is a complete fabrication.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, it appears and is incorrectly attributed in several academic papers originating not only in India but also in China, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, West Asia, and South-East Asia.

With the renewed global interest in Asia and the Indo-Pacific, the limited number of academic papers by Indian authors that have been placed in the public domain are now slowly being discovered or re-discovered. Sadly, Indian military writing is frequently, almost as a matter of course, in fact, stamped as ‘Classified’, leading to the creation of an incorrect but nevertheless deep-rooted perception in the collective mind of external observers that Indian do not write (or think) at the strategic level.

Even Western observers today acknowledge that for *“every apocryphal quote from the US naval strategist Alfred Mahan about the Indian Ocean as the fulcrum of 21st-century history, there is a real one from India’s long-neglected KM Pannikar, who wrote in the 1940s”*.<sup>5</sup> There are many who feel, therefore, that the time is right to give Western thinkers a ‘well deserved rest’ as we develop a line of thinking that is uniquely Indian and is, therefore, most suited to our own specific requirements. Others would argue, possibly correctly, that this has already happened, even though it may not have been formally codified.

Mindsets are not formed overnight, nor do they change within a brief period of time. Instead, they evolve slowly, with new ideas only gradually gaining acceptance and moderating older ones. A young officer learns warfighting, not only by reading the works of great strategists, but also, and more importantly, by interacting with his superiors. Generations of Commanding Officers have thus left the imprint of their ideas on the minds their subordinates. As these subordinates move up the ladder, they are exposed to fresh ideas, and adopt those which they find interesting and/or promising, usually adapting them to meet their own contemporary requirements and tempering them with the ideas they had inherited. This cyclic continuum of ‘adopt’ and ‘adapt’ has resulted in the Indian Navy having a thought process that is uniquely Indian, albeit with influences of Mahan, Corbett, Gorshkov, and many others.

The need to understand the historical development of naval strategy, and to study contrasting viewpoints remains important, even fascinating, not only for the lessons that may be gleaned from the

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. The article also states that James Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara of the United States Naval War College have been following the “uses and abuses” of Mahan.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Rory Medcalf, “Increasing links between Western research institutions and their counterparts in China are opening up new opportunities”, *American Review*, 07 November 2010. <https://www.usmc.edu.au/analysis/advance-column>

ideas themselves but also for the new ideas that may result whilst objectively examining the merits of these contrasting ideas. If naval warfare or maritime strategy is accepted to be an art (rather than a precise mathematical science) then, in the words of one of the ‘great masters’ the “*artistic point of view allows us to behold the great strategic writings regardless of their time or place or origin, with admiration and envy*”.<sup>6</sup> The ideas may, therefore, be worth discussing and debating for their sheer artistic brilliance alone.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to condense all the ideas of the ‘masters’ in a few scant pages. It is, however, important to examine the ideas of each individual thinker and to contrast them with other, often-opposing ideas. It would be futile to try and figure out which idea was ‘correct’ or to determine which has had a greater influence on Indian maritime thinking. All of them have, to varying extents, helped shape navies the world over, with the Indian Navy being no exception. A tabulated summary of these often-contrasting views may, therefore, help in identifying some of the ‘waypoints’ along the course and help crystallise thoughts while planning for the future. Indeed, this is as important for civilian and uniformed officers and officials tenanted mid-level and high-level posts within the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of External Affairs, as it is for officers tenanted similar levels of appointment at the Integrated Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence (Navy) or the Headquarters, Integrated Defence Staff.

To begin with, let me compare the ideas of the two ‘blue water’ Western thinkers who are, arguably, also the best known of the lot — Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan and Sir Julian Corbett<sup>7</sup>. Whilst some analysts have summarised<sup>8</sup> the individual works of these two authors, others<sup>9</sup> have undertaken a comparative analysis of the primary differences (albeit in a specific context). Commenting, in 2011, on the US Navy’s Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC), one commentator opined that it “*appears to mark a transition from ‘Mahanian’ to ‘Corbettian’ assumptions about warfare in regions like the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean region*”<sup>10</sup>. Are these two authors, then, so different that any examination of their views must be an ‘either/or’ proposition? Can one take some views from Mahan and some from Corbett or does the acceptance of one automatically imply negation of the other? A tabulated summary of their thoughts may be useful: -

<b>Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840 –1914)</b>	<b>Sir Julian Stafford Corbett (1854-1922)</b>
<b>Major Works<sup>11</sup></b>	<b>Major Works</b>
The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783	England in the Mediterranean: A Study of the Rise and Influence of British Power Within the Straits,

<sup>6</sup> Raoul Castex, *Strategic Theories*, Selections translated and edited with an introduction by Eugenia C. Kiesling (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 21-22

<sup>7</sup> Selected works by the original authors as well summaries of their works by various scholars have been referred to whilst tabulating the thoughts. A gist of their works may be referred to in (i) Milan Vego, *Naval Classical Thinkers And Operational Art*. <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1014479.pdf> (ii) William R Sprance, *The Russo-Japanese War: The Emergence of Japanese Imperial Power*, Journal of Military and Strategic Studies, Winter 2004, Vol. 6, Issue 3, <https://jmss.org/article/view/57800/43474> and (iii) John J. Klein, *Space Warfare : Strategy, Principles and Policy*, Chapter 3, *Maritime Strategic Principles*, (Routledge, 2012)

<sup>8</sup> Vego, *Naval Classical Thinkers and operational art*

<sup>9</sup> Sprance, *The Russo-Japanese War*

<sup>10</sup> James R. Holmes, “From Mahan to Corbett? The New U.S. Joint Operational Access Concept Implies a Shift in Navy Strategy in Contested Parts of the World”, *The Diplomat*, 11 December 2011

<sup>11</sup> ‘Major Works’ tabulated are as mentioned by Milan Vego, *Naval Classical Thinkers and Operational Art*. Project Gutenberg’ (an online ebook resource) offers 16 books by Mahan. Books by other authors discussed are also available

<p>The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire</p> <p>Naval Strategy Compared and Contrasted with the Principles and Practice of Military Operations on Land</p>	<p>1603–1713</p> <p>Some Principles of Maritime Strategy (Classics of Sea Power)</p>
<p>Introduced the concept of ‘sea control’<sup>12</sup></p> <p>Believed in massive fleets of capital ships winning decisive battles that left the victor with the command of the sea and the vanquished without the means to contest it.<sup>13</sup></p> <p>Advocated ‘seeking’ this ‘decisive battle’.</p> <p>Asserted the need for a strategic objective beyond tactical victory, because <i>“unless the position won is strategically decisive . . . the battle might as well, or better, never have been fought.”</i><sup>14</sup></p>	<p>Stated that you cannot conquer the sea because it is not susceptible to ownership. Opined that “permanent general control” while being a worthy goal may prove unattainable. Therefore, moved beyond the concept of physical destruction of the enemy to emphasise the importance of ‘passage on the sea’.</p> <p>Termed command of the sea as a ‘relative’ concept, rather than an ‘absolute’ one, which could be categorised as general or local, temporary or permanent.</p> <p>Redefined ‘sea control’ by laying down the conditions in which it could be achieved.</p> <p>Probably the first to introduce concepts of limited wars, sea denial and the strategic defensive.</p>
<p>While not totally disregarding interdiction of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), felt that this ought not to be the primary form of naval warfare<sup>15</sup>, because <i>“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... This overbearing power can only be exercised by great navies...”</i><sup>16</sup>. Therefore, commerce-raiding could no more substitute for a fleet than a militia could substitute for a regular army.</p>	<p>Disagreed that the enemy fleet was always the centre of gravity (he did not advocate the “big battle” approach)<sup>17</sup>. Viewed SLOC-interdiction as a valid form of warfare that could be undertaken by both the weaker as well as the stronger adversary.</p> <p>In general, he favoured economy of effort and lower-risk strategies<sup>18</sup>, and thereby viewed trade-warfare as a force-multiplier that could give advantages greater than the risks posed by its adoption.</p>

<sup>12</sup> The terms ‘sea control’ and ‘sea denial’ are used here are to convey the sense that they are commonly understood today. The aim is to capture the thoughts rather than the specific words used

<sup>13</sup> The emphasis on capital ships and ‘command’ of the seas is a recurring theme in Mahan’s works. For a commentary see, Philip A Crowl, *Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Naval Historian*, in Peter Paret et al, eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), ch. 16

<sup>14</sup> AT Mahan, *Retrospect Upon the War Between Japan and Russia*, Naval Administration and Warfare (Boston: Little Brown, 1918), 136

<sup>15</sup> John Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 45-46

<sup>16</sup> AT Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660 – 1783*, (originally published Boston: Little Brown, 1918), 138

<sup>17</sup> Sprance, *Russo-Japanese War*, 2

<sup>18</sup> Though, admittedly, he was not risk-averse but rather advocated ‘prudent action’ even if the risk was high

<p>Treated offensive and defensive positions as separate and distinct.</p> <p>Emphasised the need for the offensive and felt that defensive positions ceded the initiative to the enemy.</p>	<p>Saw both as complementary positions which could co-exist. ‘Offensive defence’, with an offensive counter-strike being the heart and soul of the defensive position was introduced. Opined that defensive positions are inherently stronger than offensive ones.</p>
<p>Believed that fleet concentration was the most important principle of naval warfare and, therefore, advocated that a fleet should never be divided, as victory at sea is only possible by concentrating the fleet. Propounded the dictum that a fleet should never divide itself into fractions that were <i>“individually smaller than an individual enemy”</i><sup>19</sup>.</p> <p>Admittedly saw this concentration in terms of mutual support rather than in terms of geographical separation, stating that a <i>“very considerable separation in space may be consistent with . . . mutual support.”</i> Felt that navies should apply the principle of concentration in both letter and spirit with the <i>“essential underlying idea (being) that of mutual support.”</i><sup>20</sup></p>	<p>Viewed concentration as a much more flexible concept, and felt that a fleet was stronger, not as <i>“...a homogeneous body, but a compound organism controlled from a common centre and elastic enough to permit it to cover a wide field without sacrificing the mutual support of its parts.”</i><sup>21</sup></p> <p>Opined that the principle of concentration had become <i>“a kind of shibboleth”</i><sup>22</sup> that had done more harm than good. Felt that while the principle of concentration was <i>“a truism — no one would dispute it. As a canon of practical strategy, it is untrue”</i><sup>23</sup>. Also advocated against massing force as it deterred the weaker opponent from seeking battle and presented him with an opportunity to attack his enemy’s exposed national lines of communication. An obsession with massing force also militated against stealth and surprise.</p>
<p>Was opposed to amphibious and joint operations as these wasted resources and violated the principle of concentration. Moreover, he felt that these failed to produce significant tactical benefits whilst exposing troops to danger.</p>	<p>Believed that sea and land operations are interdependent and must work together to meet the national objectives. Wrote that the paramount concern of maritime strategy is <i>“...to determine the mutual relations of your army and navy in a plan of war.”</i> Firmly believed in joint operations, regarded the navy and the army as one single weapon that could maximise each Service’s power.</p>
<p>Emphasised the importance of ‘sea communications’. Defined ‘sea communications’ as a line of movement by which a military body is kept in living connection with national power.</p> <p>‘Sea communications’ implied supplies over and beyond the limited amount that ships could carry in their own hulls. In order of priority, classified the most important logistic supplies as fuel,</p>	<p>Felt that maritime communications have a wider meaning and are not analogous to military communications, as maritime communications are common to both belligerents.</p> <p>The object of naval warfare is the control of communications and not, as in land warfare, the conquest of territory. One cannot have one’s own armed forces subsist upon the ‘command of the</p>

<sup>19</sup> AT Mahan, *Retrospect Upon the War Between Japan and Russia*, in *Naval Administration and Warfare, Some General Principles* (Boston: Little Brown, 1918)

<sup>20</sup> Mahan, *Influence*, 138

<sup>21</sup> JS Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, Project Gutenberg eBook, 131

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 134

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 161

ammunition, and food.

sea' as one could upon the enemy's territory on the land.

**Table 1: Comparing Mahan and Corbett**

Both these thinkers largely agreed that maritime security was essential to the economic prosperity and military might of a great power but differed substantially on the means to this end. Western thinkers largely see the Indian, and even the Chinese Navy, as being proponents of the Mahanian thought. As these navies grow, the influence of Corbett on them — from the Western viewpoint — is being recognised. Writing for the “*US Naval Institute Proceedings*” in 2010, James Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara examined,<sup>24</sup> in an article titled “*China's Navy: A Turn to Corbett?*”, how having imbibed Mahan's principles, the Chinese Navy is now turning to Corbett. As per the article, with China evolving as a maritime power, comparisons of Mahan and Corbett have started appearing in Chinese military literature since 2008. Sea power is possibly debated in a neat dualistic manner in the West. In case of the Indian Navy, the dichotomy is not so pronounced and contrasting thoughts may have space to co-exist and be ‘adopted’ and ‘adapted’ to suit the specific requirements. Therefore, for the Indian Navy, the two possibly co-exist — and have done so for quite some time. These have been further supplemented by other thinkers.

The ideas of thinkers from the ‘Continental School’, notably the Admiral Raoul Castex of France and Admiral Wolfgang Wegener of Germany, built upon these concepts, with the fundamental difference that unlike British and American strategists who, thanks to lack of any major threat on their land borders, tended see the navy in isolation, these thinkers were equally concerned with the role of their armies. Castex, for example, felt that a war involving two continental adversaries bordering the sea (India-Pakistan?) would ultimately depend on the result of the combat between the land armies. Control of the sea, therefore, may not even be a necessary condition for victory. Nevertheless, he felt that the command of the sea would likely have a serious impact on the operations of these armies and would thus be useful to the power that wields it. The writings of Castex are worth reading not only for the many new ideas that he propounded, but also because, in contrast to other thinkers of the day, he did not blindly idolise Mahan, stating, rather, that Mahan's prescriptions must be modified to fit unique national circumstances and ‘*materiel*’ conditions. Castex believed that historical principle was the best — but not the only — source of truth. His predictions about the future or his understanding of the changes taking place around him seem to have been better than those of his contemporaries. For example, in 1955, he published an article in the *Revue de la Défense Nationale* (National Defence review) titled “*La Russie, Rempart de l'Occident*” (Russia, the Wall of the West). This was possibly the first time that the rise of maritime China and her upcoming rivalry with the West, including Russia was predicted with accuracy. Without going into the details, some of the fresh ideas that Castex brought out in his works may be tabulated as follows: -

**Vice Admiral Raoul Castex (1878–1968)**

**Major Works**

*Theories Strategiques* (Strategic Theories) – published in five volumes

Stated that maritime war cannot be separate from the rest of the military effort. Propounded the

<sup>24</sup> James R Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, “China's Navy: A Turn to Corbett?”, *Proceedings*, US Naval Institute, December 2010.

concept of a general strategy ( <i>Strategie Generale</i> ), which unites the strategies of individual Services. This developed into the concept of grand strategy, or the ‘national security strategy’ <sup>25</sup> that we speak of today.
Felt that the concept of sea control as an absolute was misleading and utopian, as “ <i>all of the world’s united fleets would not suffice to achieve it everywhere. Nor would neutrals easily allow themselves to be cut off from trade</i> ” <sup>26</sup> . Stated that the maritime theatre of operations, unlike the area of land operations is constantly travelled by ‘strangers to the conflict’ <sup>27</sup> . He thus brought in the concept of international considerations (and consequent international pressure) on the actions of belligerents engaged in naval warfare.
Highlighted the economic importance of the sea for ensuring the continuous functioning of a nation’s commercial and industrial activity. Viewed maritime communications as much more than keeping ‘military’ supply lines open and extended these to keeping the ‘national’ supply lines open.
Considered strategic manoeuvre to be important and highlighted that the “ <i>advent of new machines has compressed both linear dimensions and time</i> ” thus posing new challenges to strategic manoeuvre.
Factored in the effect of airpower on maritime strategy

**Table 2: Relevant Maritime Aspects Espoused by Castex**

Another thinker of the ‘Continental School’, who has probably not received the attention he deserves (except within Germany), is Admiral Wegener. His main work, “*The Naval Strategy of the World War*”, was published in 1929 and was quite controversial at the time. Even today there are many who feel that his emphasis on geography may have been overplayed. He felt that the German fleet of the day was conceived in purely military terms<sup>28</sup> with naval warfare being considered simply for its own sake. Building a large battle fleet without securing free access to the open waters of the Atlantic (in the case of Germany), was according to him, essentially useless. He wrote that even when the Germans had a force powerful enough to pose a threat to British sea control, Germany’s geographical position in relation to the existing sea lanes prevented the employment of its fleet’s capability successfully. He, therefore, propounded the view that naval strategy was determined by geostrategic position in relation to the enemy’s sea communications. Naval strategy, in his view, was ‘always geographical’ and a naval planner should be concerned with ‘its changes and its stagnation with regard to trade routes’. He explained that a major battle, even a naval victory, would not be commensurate with the objective if that victory were to have been purchased by the destruction of a considerable part of the fleet. Such a nation, after the major battle, may well lack the fleet to exploit the victory. He consequently believed that strategy, as well as operational plans, were essentially determined by geography and were, therefore, dependent solely upon strategic position and not upon the relative strengths of the fleets. His ideas may not find favour with many Western thinkers, but if we acknowledge the concepts of China’s ‘Malacca Dilemma’, the ‘String of Pearls’, or even the fact that a numerically inferior Iran could possibly pose a threat to the USA in and around the Strait of Hormuz, we are essentially agreeing with him. The very title of the article cited earlier. “*Chasing Ghosts : The notion that Geography is power is making an unwelcome comeback in Asia*” seems to imply that this notion of tying geography to power is not only incorrect (as implied by the word ‘notion’) but also unwelcome. And yet, this idea has always been a part of the Asian (and not just Indian) military mindset. Rather than making a ‘comeback’, this fact is being re-discovered by Western analysts, except that they sometimes – incorrectly – attribute this to

<sup>25</sup> Vego, *Naval Classical Thinkers and operational art*

<sup>26</sup> R Castex, *Strategic Theories*, Trans. and eds. Eugenia Kiesling (Naval Institute Press, 1994), 53

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Reading Mahan had been made compulsory for German naval officers by Keiser Wilhelm II and Admiral Tirpitz used the principles to build a ‘big-ship’ navy

Mahanian thought.

Lastly, we need to examine, howsoever briefly, the views of the Russian Admiral Gorshkov and his influence on the Indian Navy. The primary difference between him and the thinkers discussed hitherto was that he was a thinking ‘practitioner’ rather than merely a ‘theoretician’. Having been at the helm of his Navy for close to three decades, he oversaw its expansion into a major power. Like his counterparts in India, he was forced to contend with almost overpowering ‘sea-blindness’ within his country’s politico-military leadership. Yet, he persevered in *“his persistence in pounding the square peg of sea power into a land power-centered round hole”*.<sup>29</sup> While propounding a more balanced fleet and a much greater naval role in the national policy, he was also a realist who understood the political compulsions of the Soviet era. Even as he built a powerful navy, he constantly revised public articulations regarding its importance. Initially terming the navy as *“the Faithful Helper of the Army”*, he revised this to a coequal *“shoulder to shoulder”* status (1965); *“our most important instrument for exerting decisive influence on an armed conflict in theaters of war involving tremendous distances”* (1968); and, finally, *“the frontier of our motherland’s defence”*<sup>30</sup> (1969). He realised that once the ‘political elite’ developed a decision approach (‘operational code’), one needed to *“be very cautious when observing what may appear to be arbitrary changes to that approach. An actor’s operational code becomes deeply engrained, and can only be altered after years of lengthy ‘salami slicing’...or else a particularly traumatic experience”*.<sup>31</sup> It is interesting that when the Indian Navy was making a firm push for indigenisation, in the 1960s, a number of strategic discussions and interactions were held between the then Indian Navy Chief, Admiral AK Chatterji, and Admiral Gorshkov. These interactions reportedly *“stood the Indian Navy in good stead in later years.”*<sup>32</sup> How much of an influence Gorshkov had on the naval planning of those days will probably never be accurately known, but *“that a personal rapport had been established was visible when Admiral Gorshkov attended the marriage ceremonies of Admiral AKC’s daughter at the Navy House”*<sup>33</sup>.

### Admiral of the Fleet Sergey Georgyevich Gorshkov (1910–1988)

#### Major Works

Navies in War and Peace (A collection of articles published by the US Naval Institute as *Red Star Rising at Sea*)

The Sea Power of the State

Advocated a strong, balanced fleet with substantial peacetime and wartime missions and emphasised the role of the navy as an instrument of diplomacy.

Took an integrated view of sea power which was defined as the capacity of a nation to use the ‘military-economic possibilities’ of the ocean for its own purposes. This expansive view of encompassed not only the obvious military and economic components, but also the scientific, technical and environmental fields.

Believed that well-articulated plans and strategies based on a scientific methodological base are the best way to advance ‘naval science’. Naval science must always be updated with latest achievements of science and technology.

Understood strategy as comprising of *“the study of the strong and weak points of the enemy, predicting his*

<sup>29</sup> Jessica Huckabey, *The Paradox of Admiral Gorshkov*, Center for International Maritime Security, 01 October 2014. <http://cimsec.org/paradox-admiral-gorshkov/13197>

<sup>30</sup> Michael William Cramer, *Admiral of the fleet of the Soviet Union, Sergi G. Gorshkov: an operational code and thematic analysis*, (Master’s Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School Monterey 1975)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat, “The Third Indian Chief at the Helm” in *The Admiral Who Shed His Vice - An Anecdotal Biography of Admiral AK Chatterji* eds. Purobi Mukharji, Probhati Mukherjee, Arun Pratap Golaya (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2014)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. The ‘Navy House’ at New Delhi is the residence of the Chief of Naval Staff

*intentions, activeness and daring, purposefulness and flexibility in plans...and the decisive moment for action*”<sup>34</sup>. Such strategy should be constantly updated and refined.

Cautioned against decisions based on short term gains disregarding long term risk or cost. Believed (at least initially) that proponents of a large surface fleet were being unrealistic as a robust defence-industrial base was a pre-requisite to a strong, balanced navy and the *“material-technical base must be able to support desired goals”*<sup>35</sup>.

### **Table 3: Relevant Maritime Aspects Espoused by Gorshkov**

The reason for studying these many contrasting viewpoints is not only to understand how they may have all influenced our thinking in varying degree, but also to identify which concepts we agree with and which we might reject outright. This ought to shape our policy.

There is also a need to be able to identify the ‘mismatch’ (if any) in our thinking and force structures, so that we do not develop a fleet that believes (as Wegener had put it) in naval warfare simply for the sake of naval warfare. A country could fight as many ‘decisive battles’ at sea (provided these battles were offered) but *“geography, upon which everything depends, will not be altered in the slightest, and freedom of the seas would remain far beyond their reach”*<sup>36</sup>. The obvious advantages for the Indian Navy in exploiting our maritime geography – including our peninsular orientation dominating the shipping lanes – is therefore not something that is either making a ‘comeback’ or, indeed, a ‘dangerous notion’.

Having reviewed the classical thinkers, howsoever perfunctorily, it must also be admitted that changes in technology and the resulting transformation of the nature of warfare, have rendered some of these ‘classical’ ideas outdated, if not altogether obsolete. These thinkers would probably have been amongst the first to abandon or modify some of their own ideas had they been around in the present day and age. They became great by challenging the prevailing ideas and propounding theories that explained how emerging technologies (such as steam ships) could fundamentally change the way the navies could influence power. During their own lifetimes they revised their views many times over. For example, even the often (mis)quoted Mahan himself changed his thinking regarding the existence of navies, many times over. He had written that *“The necessity of a navy, in the restricted sense of the word, springs, therefore, from the existence of a peaceful shipping, and disappears with it, except in the case of a nation which has aggressive tendencies, and keeps up a navy merely as a branch of the military establishment.”*<sup>37</sup> He later conceded that he may have been wrong when, in 1911, following the Japanese-Russian war, he wrote that *“The impression is that, navies depend upon maritime commerce as the cause and justification of their existence. To a certain extent, of course, this is true; and, just because true to a certain extent, the conclusion is more misleading”*.<sup>38</sup> Even later, he seems to have once again changed his mind when he wrote that *“a navy may be necessary where there is no shipping . . . more and more it becomes clear, that the function of navies is distinctly military and international, whatever their historical origin in particular cases”*.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, while ideas continued evolving even historically, the changes in the recent past have made them

<sup>34</sup> Cramer, *Admiral of the fleet*, 55

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 56

<sup>36</sup> Wolfgang Wegener, “The Naval Strategy of the World War”, trans. Holger H Herwig (Naval Institute Press, 1989), 37

<sup>37</sup> Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power*, 2

<sup>38</sup> Mahan, *Naval Strategy*, 446

<sup>39</sup> Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered* (quoting AT Mahan in “Considerations governing the disposition of Navies”) (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2000), 81

more open to debate. Some of these ideas were controversial even when they were originally propounded, and may have gained a greater acceptance today, in part due to the status bestowed on the writers, rather than due to the merits of the ideas themselves. Nowhere is this truer than in the case of Mahan, who was certainly an able historian and arguably the greatest naval strategist. He was, nonetheless, certainly a dismal failure when predicting the future. The notion that we need to follow his ideas is, to again misquote him (that too, out of context!), “*not only a delusion but a most dangerous delusion*”.<sup>40</sup>

The reader who is still unconvinced may like to ponder on three quotes from Mahan taken from his only work dedicated to Asia (“*The Problem of Asia and its effect upon International Policies*”,<sup>41</sup> published in 1900, which is not as well-known as his other works). Predicting the future of Asia, he felt that “*the East (is) now as it was a thousand years ago, because the East does not progress*”.<sup>42</sup> On countries such as India and China, he stated that these were people “*neither knowing nor desiring progress*”<sup>43</sup> and that progress here would “*be postponed until the day when the outside more advanced civilization has need of them*”. Even if one were willing to ignore the blatantly racist overtones — as these words need to be viewed in the historical context and geopolitical realities at the time of their formulation — one cannot but reject his views, even from a purely naval perspective. Even from the Western viewpoint, he has amply been proven wrong when he predicted (in the same book) that “*the people of the United States and their successive governments have not now, nor are likely to have hereafter, in connection with the future of Asia, to consider any such complicated conditions as are presented by the surroundings of the Suez Canal and of the Levant.*”<sup>44</sup>

Can the Indian Navy, then, really be Mahanian in its outlook?

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<sup>40</sup> This had actually been stated by Mahan in the context of trade warfare and if it was sufficient to crush an enemy

<sup>41</sup> AT Mahan, *The Problem of Asia: Its Effect Upon International Politics* (Transaction Publishers, 1905)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 131

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 84

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 119