

## **New Situations and New Instruments Wallop some Naval Conceptualizations: with reference to Corbett and Mahan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The nature of naval warfare is linked to and dependent upon new instruments in the form of technological innovations. Nuclear propulsion, missiles, drones and cyber have changed the nature of warfare and coastguard capability. At the same time the roles of naval fleets have changed in both defence, deterrence, and the offense due to new situations exemplified by the Cold War, and asymmetric battles against violent and extremist organizations post 9/11. In discussing this, this article will review age-old tested naval conceptualizations provided by Corbett and Mahan, and critiques of them as offered by Booth, Gray, Grove, Jones, Rubel, Sestak, Till and Turner. Examples are presented with reference to Israel as a small to medium state and the larger maritime powers of Britain, China, Russia, and the United States. This can be used in cadet training at the naval academies such as India's about the heritage of the profession, and the development of abstract considerations for a broad philosophical appreciation of naval and maritime affairs to be applied in planning, deployment, and operation.

### **Introduction**

The process of education, particularly of those who will hold within their hands the fate of the maritime security of their nation in a world undergoing substantial changes is by no means a definitive device. A useful means to improve naval cadet training to get cadets to examine some very important conceptualizations in the light of current events. That provides a guide for them in actions that they might have to take in the future. The objective is a reflection about the heritage of the profession, the development of abstract considerations and a broad philosophical appreciation of naval and maritime affairs. That is a vehicle for developing and spreading sound strategic thought that contributes to present and future naval planning, deployment, and operations.

The problem statement that this article addresses is that today, we are facing new situations that demand a constant review of conceptualizations. The solution statement that this article offers from this problem statement is to provide a pointer to critique certain conceptualizations for their validity. This has two-fold value. The first of which is to improve naval cadet training. The second is because it can be studied in conjunction with the operational tactics and strategy when applied.

The rationale of new situations is that all countries have been impacted in the structure of international relations after major events such as World War Two, the Cold War and 9/11. The former two involving inter-state conflicts gave the nature of naval planning and deployment the clarity of a crusade and so determined the size or type of warships and

naval fleets. That being within the context of the situation and threat environment that prevailed leading to the emergence of conceptualizations into doctrine and strategy.

It was 9/11 that was a different watershed. The global increase of non-state violent and extremist organizations (VEO) with persistent low-intensity attrition threatening states offered a challenge to naval functions. Most VEO focused their activities and aggression landward against civilian targets. That forced the role of large naval forces almost into the obscurity of the mundane.

A positive element is that there are new instruments to face new situations. Technological innovations progressively during the Cold War and after such as missiles, drones and cyber gave even a small littoral warship more firepower than the largest World War Two ocean going destroyer. However, this generated an additional problem. Similarly land based missiles granted defence capabilities for example to even the smallest of states or VEO against amphibious landings.<sup>1</sup>

Such theorizing forms the basis for the starting point of this article. In this theorizing there is a temporal and thematic line of a synthesis that connects the narrative to the conceptualizations of two of many renowned and distinguished in the field. They offer us a bag of tools from these conceptualizations. These are Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan (1866-1898) and Sir Julian Corbett (1854-1922). Mahan was a naval officer whose writings were nearly 20 years earlier than Corbett who was a civilian. Corbett's theories had more historical foundation but agreed with Mahan that they were only useful to naval professionals if they understand how to adapt that theory.<sup>2</sup>

Their writings and theories are often taught at war colleges and staff colleges, and they lie at the foundation of many naval strategic writings and teaching even one hundred years after their deaths. New situations and new instruments have challenged some of the age-old classic conceptualizations provided by Corbett and Mahan. Some are redundant for large maritime powers and irrelevant for small and medium states. Some have stood the test of time for any navy in creating a vibrant enterprise. There is no fixed answer to which are the accepted norm. With the proliferation of sovereign states since the end of World War Two there is not a simple time chart of testing the validity of their conceptualizations. Each state faces directing naval thinking according to their unique situations.

Notwithstanding there are some commonalities to be seen in those conceptualizations that have stood the test of time. Large navies alike will face similar operational deployments and challenges as will those who are only engaged in coastal defence. An intrinsic element of the commonality is the relationship between naval power and defence and foreign policy. Broadly the outlet of this is evident in the type of navy. This can be divided between riverine and littoral applications (brown-water navy), open-ocean applications (blue-water navy), and something in between (green-water navy).<sup>3</sup>

Due to capabilities and costs those who have a blue-water navy are typically large maritime states engaged in global power projection. While those who have only a brown-water navy are typically small to medium states not focused on projecting power outside of their own coasts. Notwithstanding capability Professor Colin Gray who was a civilian educator but who also served as a defence adviser to both the British and American governments, notes that there are strategic advantages to states who have larger navies over those who don't.<sup>4</sup>

It is the methodology of this article to follow the thematic line of the synthesis that connects the narrative of new situations and new instruments with selective conceptualizations from Mahan and Corbett. It draws largely on existing ideas and knowledge and critiques, to contribute to the body of knowledge for the purpose of training cadets and as well as in conjunction with the NMSS. Examples stem from lessons learned and applied historically with reference to Israel as a small to medium state and the larger maritime powers of Britain, China, Russia, and the United States. Sources quoted are both primary and secondary from serving or former senior naval officers and from recognized naval analysts and strategists.

### **The Conceptualizations of Mahan and Corbett**

The starting point granting value for examining the intellectual heritage on which the understanding of naval power is based as undertaken by this article to educate cadets is to present some conceptualizations of Mahan and Corbett. While there are many more naval theorists and historians, Mahan and Corbett may well be the fathers of British naval power and maritime theory upon which many countries navies were born and initially raised. Their writings were published during the zenith of the British Royal Navy (RN) incorporating thinking from the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Both died before World War One.<sup>5</sup>

Captain Brian O'Lavin of the US Naval Special Warfare Command has written that the applicability of Mahan's intellectual heritage on naval power has been reduced within the context of the different international situations which prevail since World War Two. For example, Mahan's theory that the concentration of a nation's fleet to seek out and destroy the enemy fleet in a decisive naval battle were not applicable to the Cold War as there were no naval battles. Nor is it applicable to post 9/11 in counter insurgent battles against VEO that focus on landward attacks against civilians.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, O'Lavin writes that new situations of the post-Cold War and VEO have reduced the applicability of Corbett's intellectual heritage on naval power. For example, the validity of his conceptualization of securing the command of the sea or preventing the enemy from securing it. That means total command of the seas including all maritime communications or sea lines of communication (SLOC), whether for commercial or military purposes. The same reasoning applies that post 9/11 the conflict is in counter insurgent battles against VEO that focus on landward attacks against civilians<sup>7</sup>

Clearly once conceptualizations have been recognized as having reduced applicability then the doctrine, tactics, and strategy that incorporate them need to be reviewed. Taking this critique of conceptualizations onboard leads the narrative of new situations and new instruments of this article into a coherent synthesis that builds into an outcome. That is educating cadets to be informed naval officers that excel when in command of warships. Otherwise, the tail will be wagging the dog as naval officers' mindset will not be in harmony with the real world.

Large naval powers with blue-water navies and smaller with brown-water navies alike have recognized the need to constantly review and critique conceptualizations to

synchronize them with deployments and operations. There is an importance of accurate definitions in the conceptualizations for navies world-wide rely on a certain amount of theoretical training for all officers. For example, the United States Navy (USN) that is a blue-water navy uses the term Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD). In 2016 the head of USN naval operations, Admiral John Richardson, wanted to root it out. His reasoning was “To ensure clarity in our thinking, we will no longer use the term A2/AD as a stand-alone term (acronym) that can mean different things to different people.”<sup>8</sup> However changes take time, and it is still in use in 2023 by the USN and other branches.

A reference to this process also comes for a brown-water navy for example Israel. While there is an overall military prowess of the Israel Defence Force (IDF) according to the 2022 Global Naval Powers Ranking, Israel’s navy arm is not included among the world’s top 34 navies (unlike the navies of neighbouring countries Turkey and Egypt).<sup>9</sup> The reference is from Professor Dmitry Adamsky, who in addition to his academic career, has held positions in the Israeli Ministry of Defence and IDF including serving as assistant secretary of the committee charged with formulating Israel’s national security concept. There he addressed the importance of defining an accurate and applicable systematic naval conceptualization, especially when the nature of war changes due to technological innovations. He referred to the conceptual-organizational confusion that prevailed in the Israeli Navy on the eve of the Second Lebanon War in 2006.<sup>10</sup>

Taking Adamsky and Richardson in context is to quote Dr Benjamin Armstrong, who is a former USN naval aviator and who has lectured at U.S. Special Operations Command, the Defence Entrepreneur’s Forum at the University of Chicago, and the U.S. Naval War College. He writes that Corbett agrees with Mahan that theories are only useful to naval professionals if they understand how to adapt them. If theories don’t meet these criteria, then the conceptualizations are not fit for purpose and may well led to defeat rather than victory, or at least loss of ships and crew.<sup>11</sup>

An applied example of this rationale for a conceptualization to be accurately defined, understood, and learned before it is anchored operationally; and where the narrative leads in a coherent synthesis that builds into an outcome is given by Professor Efraim Inbar. He was the Chair of the University of Bar Ilan’s BESA Research Center. He describes the Israel Navy’s missile warships first commissioned in 1969. The first written manual for their deployment was like a Bible with a new tactical language and concepts in which the theoretical analysis of various battle situations was translated into do and don’t instructions. He adds that this wasn’t sufficient as when they entered the 1973 Yom Kippur War four years later the lessons passed down orally from naval exercises generated a specific conceptualization of what they could achieve operationally and what was impossible. In parts that differed from the original written manual.<sup>12</sup>

This article continues along this theme with the methodology of listing themes and phenomena where the synthesis is systemic and logical thinking and reasoning that has brought about changes. The structure of the article continues in two parts on 1) Revisiting Corbett’s and Mahan’s conceptualizations, and 2) Pursuing naval strategies. Examples are from Britain, China, Israel, Russia, and the United States. There are sub-sections in these parts to facilitate logical divisions: revisiting Alfred Mahan; revisiting Julian Corbett; decisiveness, naval supremacy, and naval control; control of all spaces, national

security & constabulary; secure sea lines of communication; power projection; and naval diplomacy. The trend that emerges is not for maritime security roles of navies to replace their traditional naval war-fighting roles. It is merely that they are elevated and draw more attention given the world environment that has less naval warfare between states and increasing demands for maritime security functions.

## **Revisiting Corbett's and Mahan's Conceptualizations**

In the years following World War Two there emerged both new situations and new instruments. The former largely dictated to by the latter for the size, shape, and functions of naval forces. The first catalyst was the advent of nuclear weapons and the strategy of deterrence. Warship deployment progressively became tools of diplomacy and deterrence rather than to engage the other side in naval combat as conceptualized by Corbett and Mahan.<sup>13</sup>

An example of this is submarines. Nuclear powered with nuclear weapons submarines for example in the RN and the USN provided a unique service in the Cold War and beyond. Deployed in the depths of the oceans and undetectable they guaranteed a nuclear second-strike capability with intercontinental ballistic missiles. Such a strategy of deterrence and naval deployment challenged the conceptualizations of Mahan who had not noted the importance of technological developments.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, since the end of World War Two there has only been two occasions when submarines attacked and sunk another ship. One was the sinking of the Argentine Navy's ARA General Belgrano (C-4), a light cruiser, on 2 May 1982 during the Falklands War. This was by the RN nuclear-powered submarine HMS Conqueror with a conventional warhead torpedo and the loss of 323 lives.<sup>15</sup> The other was by the Pakistan Navy's diesel powered PNS Hangor (S131) on 9 December 1971. It sank the Indian Navy's INS Khukri (F149), an anti-submarine frigate, with one homing torpedo.<sup>16</sup>

## **Revisiting Alfred Mahan**

Submarines were not the only example of the changing role of naval forces as proxy land wars dominated the Cold War and not naval battles. Functions such as command of the sea and decisive battles (through which naval supremacy is supposed to be achieved) were less dominate components of naval strategy for all warships than previously. When the Cold War ended in 1989 the United States Naval War College (USNWC) went so far as to teach that the USN should assume that it had command of the sea. It didn't need to exercise control through constant naval presence.<sup>17</sup>

Taking this onboard and besides the end of the Cold War there were two other events that led the USN to move away from Mahan's conceptualizations of ocean battles. This eventuality guided the USN fleet in restructuring with new doctrine and strategy. The first was when Iraq launched two Exocet-type French made missiles on the American destroyer USS Stark that was sailing in the Persian Gulf in May 1987. How to defend

warships from missiles, mines and artillery batteries located landward and indeed deploy amphibious landings facing the same threats became a priority.<sup>18</sup>

The second was experiences from the Gulf War of 1991 (Operation Desert Storm). It involved combined and joint operations with the primary role of the USN being support of landward operations. At the onset of battle the USN launched 12 Tomahawk cruise missiles against land targets from submarines while other naval surface ships launched 285 at the same time.<sup>19</sup>

Mahan's naval warfare conceptualizations didn't include such littoral or coastal warfare or such threats. These were all wake-up calls that conceptualizations such as Mahan's of two fleets that duel until one of them wins were not applicable for contemporary naval operations. The USN was acutely aware that warships and systems had to have additional roles of defending from land attack, striking land targets, and in joint with multi-service and combined allied action. Moreover, naval officers had to be trained for such diverse roles and functions.<sup>20</sup>

Other examples that brought significance to these observations include the attack of an Islamic fundamentalist group Al-Qaeda by an explosive boat on the destroyer USS Cole in October 2000 outside the port of Aden;<sup>21</sup> and attacks on naval vessels along the coast of Yemen by Houthi rebels ongoing since 2004.<sup>22</sup>

Such new situations and new instruments progressively led to an evolution in USN doctrine and strategy. This negated many of Mahan's conceptualizations and brought about a new size and shape of the USN. In 2023 Captain Drennan of the USN whose sea duty assignments have included two Los Angeles Class Fast Attack Submarines and five Nimitz Class Aircraft Carriers, including Chief Engineer in USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75) summed up such a USN evolution. He observed the post-Cold War and post 9/11 type of warfare as being fundamentally different from warfare on the open sea for two main reasons. Firstly, warships that can operate in littoral areas are limited in size, speed of movement, and dimensions (due to limited manoeuvrability). Secondly, there is a likelihood that the enemy will take advantage of his opponent's closeness to the shore to attack ships.<sup>23</sup>

Such experiences and an evolution in doctrine and strategy is not confined to large blue-water navies. An example of this for a small brown-water navy was damage to the Israel Navy Ship (INS) Hanit in the Second Lebanon War 2006. It was hit a Chinese made land to sea missile launched by Hezbollah that is an Iranian proxy terror group, when it was close to shore supporting land forces.<sup>24</sup> Conscious of the need for change the commander of the Israel Navy Admiral Eli Sharvit (2016-2021) identified the cause of the problem. He said that the navy was not capable of defending its ships from land-based missiles as coastal/littoral warfare and asymmetrical warfare had not been concepts in the doctrine and strategy and so captains had not been trained. A process to do so commenced.<sup>25</sup>

## **Revisiting Julian Corbett**

New situations and new instruments also demand reviewing the conceptualizations of Corbett.<sup>26</sup> These should also be critiqued with those of Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond

who was a naval officer and his only disciple as a naval historian.<sup>27</sup> It could be argued they were as equally influential strategic thinkers on naval and maritime strategic matters as Mahan.<sup>28</sup>

Corbett's writings are different from those of Mahan as added the dimension of land warfare. He believed that total defeat or to subjugate the adversary, could not be realized by naval warfare alone and required victory in land battles.<sup>29</sup> Corbett used Carl von Clausewitz's book *On War* as a heuristic point of departure.<sup>30</sup>

At first glance it could be assumed that with this reference to land warfare that perhaps Corbett's conceptualizations would be applicable to proxy wars in the Cold War and counterinsurgency against VEO after 9/11. However, Professor Jerker Widén of the Swedish Defence University who has studied Corbett says this not the case. The reasoning is that Corbett did not address sea to land warfare but proclaimed land combat between the adversaries. The Cold War instruments in the form of nuclear weapons and inter-continental ballistic missiles with the doctrine of deterrence did not lead to direct land battles between America and the Soviet Union. Even wars between ideological proxies for example Vietnam highlighted that victory or loss in these didn't result in total defeat of either side.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, Dr Prakash Metaparti an expert on logistics and maritime studies at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University informs that the dominate warfare post-9/11 is asymmetrical combat that does not postulate naval forces. Given their lack of roles against adversaries, the functions of navies have moved from naval warfare more towards maritime security.<sup>32</sup>

In revisiting both Mahan and Corbett, it is Professor Geoffrey Till who is one of strongest advocates that the conceptualizations of Corbett and Mahan have waned and have in part been walloped by new situations and new instruments. He is a British naval historian who has taught at the Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, Royal Navy College Greenwich and the Joint Services Command and Staff College educating cadets and officers. His writings echo and were echoed by teachings at the USNWC. He emphasized that the location of engagement with an adversary would define strategy. He pointed out that while the area of coastal areas is barely sixteen percent of the global maritime space, it has decisive importance. This is since all ports are in them as are the choke points that could restrict or limit access. That highlighted the importance of littoral areas to the economic well-being and security of countries. So, he placed the battle more inshore than in the open oceans.<sup>33</sup>

## **Pursuing Naval Strategies**

Clearly then there are new situations and new instruments elucidated both by naval officers, civilian researchers and theoreticians and professors at educating faculties. Going one step further and with deeper analysis is to note that the modern naval arena is not just a division of open sea and coasts. It can be divided into functions where Professor Ken Booth provides three main categories: military, policing, and diplomacy (Trinity of

Naval Functions). He educates at a university and has also been a visiting researcher at the USNWC.<sup>34</sup>

Booth's categories interjected into the legacy of Corbett's and Mahan's conceptualizations provide six topics that will be addressed in more depth as the next stage of this article: decisiveness, naval supremacy, and naval control; control of all spaces; national security & constabulary; secure sea lines of communication; power projection; and naval diplomacy.<sup>35</sup>

In doing so an appraisal is undertaken of which of Corbett's and Mahan's conceptualizations remain valid and those that do not. That also draws a full circle to demonstrate the purpose of reviewing conceptualizations for educating cadets and in conjunction to the NMSS. This indicates the importance and significance of the topic addressed in this article - pursuing naval strategies needs to be based on sound and relevant conceptualizations.

### **Decisiveness, Naval Supremacy, and Naval Control**

Ideally cadets at military education faculties should spend their time in the class and library reflecting on what the strategic world looks like so that they are better prepared for how they could operate in that world thereafter. There is no one means to achieve decisiveness, naval supremacy, and naval control yet the study of different views all contributes to doing so. Different literature and lecturers will profess a diversity of thought all resting on sound foundations to provide a more holistic picture. To be sure Mahan and Corbett had different views, both valid for certain circumstances.

For example, Mahan and Corbett differed on the decisiveness of naval power. On the one hand Mahan emphasized the victories achieved by the RN during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were indeed in decisive battles and a series of naval blockades. These were intended to achieve naval superiority (command of the sea).<sup>36</sup> Corbett thought naval power was important, but not decisive, and argued that it rarely won wars by itself. They were not able to totally defeat or subjugate the adversary. To totally defeat or subjugate the adversary required land battle. He drew his assertion on historical evidence of Britain's campaign against Napoleon's army during the Peninsular War. Yet Corbett agreed with Mahan that there needed to be a focus on denying sea command to the opponent.<sup>37</sup>

As noted previously there has been an accented reduction in the value of both Corbett and Mahan on this topic in the Cold War because there were no direct land or naval battles between the two sides that could have brought any decisiveness or victory.<sup>38</sup> The Cold War was an ideological struggle between competing political and economic beliefs, philosophies, and systems. From the 1960s on the Soviet Union looked towards global domination through revolutions and proxy wars to change leadership and political systems as called for by its President Nikita Khrushchev's.<sup>39</sup>

Intrinsically it won the battle by such means but eventually lost the war due to economic collapse in 1989. Progressively during the Cold War, the world had less states with electoral democracies. Only a handful of the tens of African, Asian, and Latin American states who attained sovereign independence after World War Two espoused electoral democracies.

By the 1980s in the last days of the Cold War only 23% of the world's states had electoral democracies. Even after the Cold War by 2016 this had risen to only 55%.<sup>40</sup>

These were astute observations taken onboard by serving naval personal. For example, Stephen Jones, a USN officer added a professional weight to these observations. He informed considering new situations and new instruments that increasingly a navy's traditional roles and tasks in supervision and surveillance of the seas and oceans was being performed by satellites and patrol planes. For this naval presence aka Mahan wasn't essential. Jones' deductions from his naval experience remained consistent throughout the Cold War and after.<sup>41</sup>

In line with practice the USN has an element of a bottom-up approach to educate and adjust doctrine and strategy. Adding to Jones' observations for example in 1974 Admiral Stansfield Turner, president of the USNWC, published his critique of the conceptualizations of naval superiority of Mahan. Turner had numerous roles including shore bombardments in the Korea War, combat operations off the coast of Vietnam and monitoring Soviets fleets. In that article, Turner referred to the missions of the USN, and claimed that the term naval superiority was outdated, and that it should be replaced by the concept naval control.<sup>42</sup>

A scholar Professor Barry Posen, who also worked as a consultant for the RAND Corporation and an analyst for the US Department of Defence, also commented on these views of serving officers and educators. He wrote that after his intensive research of both blocs in the Cold War that it was difficult to achieve naval superiority in the terms meant by Mahan and that of land warfare victories called for by Corbett. He reiterated Turner's view that the purely military role of a navy conceptualized to achieve naval superiority or supremacy would decrease. In its place could be conceptualized the role of naval control.<sup>43</sup>

A rejoinder came from Turner when he was appointed supreme commander of NATO forces in Southern Europe and later Director of the CIA. He wrote on the increasing significance of intelligence to determine the location and intent of the enemy fleet. If this was possible and successful, then naval control need only be over limited areas in terms of territory for a limited period rather than complete supremacy over the ocean.<sup>44</sup> In analysis of the immediate post-Cold War period Gray found that the shift from naval supremacy to naval control remained a valid shift. Gray argued that the goal of naval operations should be to support landward operations and not to be objectives in themselves.<sup>45</sup>

A debate and discussion ensued on this topic of decisiveness, naval supremacy, and naval control between the critiques of Mahan and Corbett. Following this could well provide the basis for assigning a simulation exercise for naval cadets in education faculties. To start the debate Professor Eric Grove further defined the term naval control. He was an educator at Britannia Royal Naval College, Royal Naval College, Greenwich and the University of Cambridge, a researcher at think tanks and consultant and coauthor for the first edition of the RN's *The Fundamentals of British Maritime Doctrine* (BR1806).<sup>46</sup>

Grove's definition of naval control commenced with agreeing with Turner that it is the conditions under which one state entity has freedom of action to use the sea for its own purposes in a certain area and for a limited period. He contributed by defining

five main categories of naval control: absolute control, working control, disputed control, actual control of the enemy and absolute control by the enemy.<sup>47</sup> Till further contributed to the debate by defining four purposes for naval control: to ensure the regular supply of the country's industry; to strengthen or resupply the forces operating overseas; to supply the Allied forces overseas; and to ensure the operation of naval forces operating in the mission of power projection on the coast.<sup>48</sup>

In 2015 Professor (Emeritus) Robert C. Rubel, of the USNWC applied to a case this discussion with reference to Mahan's and Corbett's conceptualizations on defeat or subjugation.<sup>49</sup> The case took a scenario where the main threat to America was China. It posed the question on how victory could be attained given Chinese naval strategy also has its origins in Mahan's conceptualization.<sup>50</sup> His conclusions were if China were to follow Mahan's conceptualizations on decisive naval battles, then China could not attain victory. Even if China destroyed the USN they had not occupied America. Similarly, American victory could not be discussed as a purely naval victory following Mahan's conceptualizations or with land victories following Corbett's conceptualizations. Chinese naval and land forces could not be destroyed, and China could not be occupied. Decisiveness could only be attained by neutralizing China's power projection globally by other means, be they economic or political.<sup>51</sup>

## **Control of All Spaces**

The crux of Rubel's case about America and China are like those discussed in the British maritime doctrine document of the RN published in 2017. A wide range of potential state and VEO adversaries were looked at. The conclusions were that victory could not be measured solely from naval or land combat. Decisiveness towards defeat of an adversary could be outlined when there was control of the maritime space (including the seabed), the airspace above it, and the landward coast - all no longer posing a threat.<sup>52</sup> In 2021 USN Admiral Joe Sestak added to this thinking on decisiveness and victory. He pointed out that no country could achieve supremacy in maritime or air space without also controlling cyber space.<sup>53</sup>

Such contemplations and thinking are not only applicable to the doctrine and strategy of large maritime blue-water navies for example Britain and the United States. They can also be found in the experiences, doctrine, and strategy of a small brown-water navy such as Israel. In 2016 the commander of the Israel Navy Admiral Eli Sharvit called for a strategic review given that a prerequisite for naval operations offshore required that a land-based missile threat must be neutralized. That meant control of the land adjacent to the coast.<sup>54</sup> In 2022 the current commander of the Israel Navy Admiral Sa'ar Selma added that naval control would be seen as serving a purpose within a battlespace and not an end. The battlespace was multi-dimensional, and victory was required in all (land, sea, air and cyber).<sup>55</sup>

It is fair to state that these views of a wide range of battlespaces place the nail in the coffin operationally for Mahan's and Corbett's conceptualizations of victory be it naval solely or naval and land. That does not mean that they should be ignored. It is important

to educate cadets on history that includes not only their writings but also to add their critiques. To this must be added real world contemporary cases as part of simulations to elicit and develop decision making skills for when they take command of warships. It would not be expected of cadets and officers to know and be capable of doing everything, given concern that this might lead them to be jack of all trades and master of none. More preferential would for each to specialize to be an expert in certain functions and roles. Yet an element of being an expert would require being aware of the function and roles of others to succeed in joint and combined operations in a multi-dimensional environment.

## **National Security & Constabulary**

The sea battlespace can be further divided to include maritime. Maritime constabulary or policing roles have also been conceptually referred to as cognitive dissonance in certain academic literature.<sup>56</sup> It might be cost effective to have the same ships undertake multiple roles and indeed they may have the capability to do by being platforms for an array of weapons and systems. However, the rules of engagement for different roles requires that the ships' captains must be confident to make an array of decisions with the appropriate knowledge.

That necessitates a comprehensive education not only on tactics and strategy in naval warfare, counter-piracy and counter-terrorism but also coastguard functions that include: maritime safety; vessel traffic management; ship casualty and assistance service; fisheries inspection and control; border control; environmental protection and response; prevention and suppression of trafficking and smuggling and connected law enforcement; search and rescue; monitoring and surveillance; customs activities; accident and disaster response; maritime, ship and port security; and in protecting national assets in the maritime economic zone.<sup>57</sup>

A larger maritime country might have both a navy and a coastguard such as the United States. A singular national fleet tasked with overall naval control for warfare, national security, coastguard roles, and performing peacetime constabulary duties is more likely evident in small to medium countries.<sup>58</sup> An example of this is Israel because of budget constraints. It has only nine corvette/ missile ships and forty-five patrol boats for a coastline of 273 km with three major ports, eight marinas and offshore gas fields. Almost seventy percent of Israeli citizens live in cities and settlements along this coast.<sup>59</sup>

The lessons could start by a discussion on what transpires when a new situation arises and what they would do. That in essence is the theme of this article in reviewing the conceptualizations of Mahan and Corbett given new situations and new instruments. A case that could be applicable to is Israel's experience of the defence of offshore gas fields. Israel's experience that led to new instruments both in warships and weapon systems started in 2012.<sup>60</sup> This unfolded against the background of the discovery of the offshore submarine gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea off Israel, Lebanon, and Cyprus. The Israeli Cabinet tasked the navy with the task of protecting Israel's sovereign and economic interests in these and not to set up a separate coastguard.<sup>61</sup>

For this purpose, Admiral Ram Rothberg commander of the Israel Navy (2011-2016), formulated a new operating concept that had two components. The first was how to protect the gas production platforms from rocket and missile attack. The defence industries responded by developing the naval C-DOME system. That is an advanced naval configuration of the land-based Iron Dome system has proven very successful protecting against thousands of rockets and missiles launched from Gaza and Lebanon in recent years.<sup>62</sup>

The second component was to evaluate warships as platforms for the C-DOME. The navy evaluated and found that its existing fleet could not do this or even effect naval control of the sea surrounding the gas production platforms. These were further offshore than the navy had ever operated. Four new corvette type ships were specially constructed in German shipyards and entered service as the Sa'ar 6 Magen class in 2021. These also gave the navy additional long-distance war fighting capability. So, the IDF Chief of Staff Eisenkot took advantage to add to the navy the role of striking VEO in foreign countries, protecting shipping lanes and supporting special operations throughout the Mediterranean Sea and deep into the Indian Ocean. Hence carrying a helicopter was added to the ship's design.<sup>63</sup>

Whilst these were warfare and maritime security roles, an additional element emerged to the new situation and that was the authority over maritime economics. A private multinational corporation (The Chevron Corporation) had the contract for the production facilities of the gas fields. But in times of conflict the navy was granted the authority to shut them down for security reasons. Naval officers had to be educated to be able to make such informed decisions. This was put to the test in May 2021 during a counter-insurgent operation in Gaza. Production from the gas fields was shut down by the navy for a few weeks due to threats of the gas production platforms being hit by missiles launched by the Hamas VEO in Gaza. The navy had multiple tasks simultaneously to protect these platforms with the C-DOME and at the same time land special operations ground forces as well as launch sea to land missiles.<sup>64</sup>

This example of protecting gas fields and production platforms is a case where a navy has been assigned a role to achieve national maritime security not addressed in the conceptualizations of Mahan and Corbett as they did not exist in their lifetime. For today's world the decisiveness they referred to has changed to one of ensuring defence and security short of combat but that is a form of victory. Another three dimensions that similarly are short of combat but require achieving decisiveness are the next three subsections on: secure sea lines of communication, power projection and naval diplomacy. In these elements of their conceptualizations are shown to retain certain validity.

## **Secure Sea Lines of Communication**

The purpose of reviewing Corbett's and Mahan's conceptualizations is also to examine where they remain valid in pursuing strategies with the goal of educating cadets in conjunction to the NMSS. One of these is Mahan's argument that certain functions

cannot be replaced by any other means than a naval presence of ships. That is valid today for example, in addressing secure sea lines of communication (SLOC). The security of shipping lanes and keeping them open is a constabulary function. It is essential to ensure trade, logistics, passenger ships and the movement of military forces between ports. These could be short lanes along coasts, through straits, harbor inlets, canals and bays or long sailing routes in the open sea.<sup>65</sup>

Whilst the function and role and the conceptualizations of such a necessity remain valid since Mahan's and Corbett's day new instruments have evolved. These take the form of diverse technologies some of which are not naval. This impacts the number and types of warships needed for SLOC. Stephen Woodall has looked at this. He served in the USN and has had academic and research positions. He wrote in his doctoral research that in World War Two a force of ten aircraft carrier battlegroups might have been required, with a strategy built around defensive barrier operations to protect the Atlantic SLOC. He compared this to the Cold War where this could have been achieved by three carrier battlegroups positioned near maritime chokepoints. The difference being the range and firepower of naval aircraft, cyber to detect the location of an adversary and missiles to strike them.<sup>66</sup>

To facilitate education on such changes a simulation exercise could be given to cadets to stand in the shoes of decision-makers and warship captains. They will be provided with the outline of events and theories, asked to make decisions, and then see how the real-world situation evolves in comparison. Such an exercise would guide them in actions and decisions that they may have to take in the future.

One such case of SLOC they could be asked to examine and simulate is the blockade of Ukrainian ports by the Russian Black Sea Fleet after the onset of hostilities in February 2022. The blockade prevented the export of wheat and grain and became one of the main challenges to global human security between February and July 2022. One option was to break the naval blockade by NATO fleets led by the USN. There were two dilemmas. One was that it would have drawn NATO into the war. The other was that it would have violated the (Montreux) Convention regarding the Regime of the Straits (1936) that restricts the entry of foreign warships into the Black Sea - the SLOC between the Black and Mediterranean Seas. The quandary was whether to abide by international convention and customary practices or whether to take military action for humanitarian purposes. If the latter path had been chosen there was a danger of escalation with many more casualties and states involved.<sup>67</sup> If those cadets in the simulation thought that naval means could resolve this SLOC conundrum, then they would have been mistaken. The solution achieved was a United Nations and Turkey led diplomatic effort to resolve the export blockade.<sup>68</sup>

## **Power Projection**

Whilst securing and keeping SLOC open and defending ports and entire coastlines requires in part naval presence this might not be enough. What might be needed is taking

the battle or the threat of battle to the territory of the adversary. The dictum being that the best means of the defence is the offense and not on one's own territory. That is achieving decisiveness, naval control, or even victory without placing one's own country and population in a position of facing an adversary's firepower. Pursuing such a strategy could be by power projection and / or naval diplomacy. That means Mahan's and Corbetts's conceptualizations that naval forces are a means of projecting power to, within, and from the maritime space remain valid.<sup>69</sup>

However, some new situations and new instruments require certain additions and modifications to their conceptualizations. Today power projection is more than just naval power even though a dictum could be that the more naval oriented the adversary state is, the higher the level of naval power projection will be required. A group of academic researchers and professors have examined many inter-state wars, proxy wars and VEO counter-insurgency operations including the most recent in Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine. They deduce that power projection can be separated into two categories. The first is when power projection is related to the combat component of the naval strategy. The second is related to the diplomatic component of the naval strategy. In the latter fleets can be used as a show of force to deter, dissuade, or persuade short of combat or to bring the war to an end.<sup>70</sup>

Examples of the first are provided by Till who describes that during World War Two naval power projection included the destruction of enemy forces, logistical support, and amphibious assault operations. The landings in Normandy in June 1944 led to the end of World War Two. Another example is from the Cold War, that of the Inchon landings in the Korean War 1950. These two examples lend to naval involvement of power projection being the support of land forces as a strategic combat enabler.<sup>71</sup>

Yet progressively during the Cold War and after amphibious assault operations have become restricted due to new instruments. Owing to shore defences by missiles Till has concluded that the chances of carrying out successful major amphibious operations are low.<sup>72</sup> A case on this to analyze for educating cadets is the Russia-Ukraine conflict since February 2022. The Russian Black Sea Fleet was not able to use its amphibious fleet to land ground forces on the shores of Ukraine. Terrain constraints, amphibious lift limitations, difficulty sustaining air dominance, and logistical issues all pointed to the chancy success of any amphibious operation.<sup>73</sup>

Clark and Sloman add to the debate on power projection related to the combat component of the naval strategy with cases on VEO. They inform that it is easier than previously for navies to use a relatively small amount of force to attack long areas of the coastline in power projection. The range and firepower of missiles today are far superior to those of naval artillery of Corbett's and Mahan's day. But missiles can also be used by VEO and states as defenders to limit the attacker's options to successfully carry out amphibious operations by defending the beaches with missiles.<sup>74</sup>

To this can be added the experience and pursuit of strategies by a small state's brown-water navy that is also its coastguard. That entails power projection as a prompt response to some potential flash point including against insurgents and wider problems of criminality and disorder at sea. Israel is an example with information provided by Admiral Yedidia

Groll-Yaari, the commander of the Israel navy (2000-2004). He found that naval power projection for warfare and maritime security can be achieved by using warships offshore, naval based drones and cyber in the integration of systemic warfare. He introduced three battle-space operational concepts for this: control, attack, and sustainment.<sup>75</sup>

Dr Tim Benbow, who has lectured at the Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth and the Defence Studies Department at King's College London where he is also the Deputy Director of The Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies uses these concepts with cases. He shows that naval forces are well suited to coastguard type power projection operations on the spectrum of conflict intensity short of inter-state wars. He provides examples on control of the maritime space, attacking insurgents and criminal elements and sustaining secure SLOC for cargo and passenger vessels.<sup>76</sup>

## Naval Diplomacy

Inherent to any form of naval power projection is the political purpose and goal. This relates to the diplomatic component of the naval strategy of power projection. Naval doctrine and strategy have an umbilical tie to defence and foreign policy and diplomacy. Navies are a tool and means to achieve these. That lends to another element of the conceptualizations of Mahan and Corbett that retains certain validity. Mahan commented on this with direct reference to Corbett's study of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). He wrote that the strength of English action in that war came from holding the three related functions of army, navy, and diplomacy in one hand.<sup>77</sup>

Examples are provided by Sir James Cable, a British diplomat and naval strategic thinker who wrote a series of works published between 1971 and 1994 about gunboat diplomacy. He defined it as the use or threat of limited naval force, otherwise than as an act of war, to secure advantage or to avert loss. He divided the examples of gunboat diplomacy into four categories: definitive, purposeful, catalytic, and expressive. All of them are tools of diplomacy as a means of coercion. That is more the threat of the use of force that resulted in not needing to use force because the objectives were achieved by this show of force or capability as a type of diplomacy.<sup>78</sup>

Booth has added examples in the post-Cold War era. He informed that the diplomatic role of the navy was a part of a state's foreign policy. According to him, to keep essential shipping lanes unimpeded, such as those in the Persian Gulf, the foreign policy of the United States relies on the symbolic display of naval strength. He highlighted photos from the USN where in the caption that appears next to aircraft carriers it is written 90,000 tons of diplomacy.<sup>79</sup>

Naval diplomacy is as evident a role for small states with brown-water navies as it is for large maritime powers with blue-water navies. Kevin Rowlands, the head of the Royal Navy Strategies Study Center, surveyed 500 naval incidents from the post-Cold War era. He notes that both small, medium, and large maritime states procure vessels with different systems on them to suit a mix of doctrine and strategies including as a means of foreign policy and diplomacy. He identifies three types of naval diplomacy: cooperation,

convincing, and coercion. These give warships and navies symbols of national sovereignty and power, and not only purely military roles.<sup>80</sup>

An example for Israel comes from the IDF Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Aviv Kochavi in 2019. He referred to the status of manned surface vessels. He stressed that despite the growing trend towards the development of unmanned vessels, they would be used mainly for deception missions, electronic warfare, counter-arming, and anti-terrorist warfare. They could not and would not replace manned surface vessels as they are essential for naval control and naval diplomacy.<sup>81</sup>

This role of naval diplomacy places warships' captains as a feature and tool of civil-military relations (CMR). They must diplomatically coerce through their presence when projecting power but short of provoking an armed response. That leads to the need to educate the topic of international relations, political science and CMR at naval academies. The objective is to appreciate decision making and command and control as being a mix of: 1) the professional military expertise of the commander of a naval force in the field; 2) naval control resting with a joint branch headquarters that would have the relative advantage of monitoring, controlling and influencing the fire attack plans of all the forces (land, sea and air) and intelligence on the arrays of the enemy; and 3) power projection and naval diplomacy determined by the goals and objective of political elites.

Crucial to how this is undertaken from a technical point of new instruments is the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). It is an enabler of capabilities in their broad sense of command, control, communications, computers (C4) and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) – in sum C4IRS. This also enables political elites to view the battle from afar making them better informed. This might be positive enabling the professional expertise of naval officers commanding warships to have an input to decision making.<sup>82</sup>

It might also be negative as political elites might wish to issue commands to the warship captains. A case study of China that is a blue-water navy state on this centralized control of forces has been undertaken by Professor Andrew Erickson from the USNWC. He warns with examples that such over-centralization towards the direct involvement of political elites may harm the capabilities of the Chinese navy.<sup>83</sup>

Similar positives and negatives apply for a small brown-water navy state such as Israel. Or Barak who is researcher at the National Security Studies Center at the University of Haifa informs that increased computerization has value because it enables the integration of military decision-making of different units at the tactical, strategic, and systemic levels. Yet it could lead to inexperienced and untrained civilian-political elites' involvement in battlefield decision making.<sup>84</sup> In sum naval cadets need to be educated also to project power and be diplomatic in CMR with their own political elites to ensure that the strategy pursued is a viable naval and maritime one.

## Conclusion

This article commenced with the problem statement that we are facing new situations and new instruments with a bag of tools dependent upon age-old conceptualizations. The solution statement it offered was to provide a pointer to critique certain conceptualizations of Mahan and Corbett for their validity and hence pursue appropriate strategies. This has

a two-fold value. The first of which is to contribute to naval cadet education. The second is because it can be studied in conjunction to the NMSS.

To sum up the points raised in this article would be to say that now everything is in the melting pot. A conclusion to be drawn is that there has been a paradigmatic shift in naval affairs since Corbett and Mahan. This shift involves a revolution in military affairs in terms of technology, operating doctrines, strategies and tactics, joint and combined operations, and in the aspects of decision-making of civil-military relations in real-time. Increasingly with new situations and new instruments since World War Two it is fair to state that many conceptualizations offered by Corbett and Mahan for the use of naval power have changed. Some remain valid.

Cadets at military faculties are students and students do not learn simply by listening. Cramming for tests, rote learning, and blind tradition of following traditional texts such as Corbett and Mahan need in addition a critiquing of, by, and for today's world. Any professional military education system requires a mix of a general education, with an emphasis on the individuality and development of a cadet's critical faculties. A lecture and an article can but touch on the fringe of a subject; it can indicate certain points, draw out certain principles, excite interest—or otherwise. But it cannot replace the hard reading, the persistent study, the writing down, and the discussion of views by which alone a professional's knowledge is to be distinguished from that of an amateur and practical experience.

To this end, a simulation exercise that might be undertaken at naval academies could be to get cadets to delve deep into the heritage of the profession, the development of abstract considerations and a broad philosophical appreciation of naval and maritime affairs to determine the desirable characteristics of naval and maritime strategy for their future positions in the real world aboard ships. This article has provided a few pointers to help this, and so too contributes to present and future naval planning, deployment, and operations. Whilst this article has drawn largely on existing ideas and knowledge it's contribution to the body of knowledge and to education is by providing a critique on how new situations and new instruments have walloped some age-old and tested naval conceptualizations.

The potentials to be developed and to be realized are in the next steps. Moreover, the nurturing of specialist think tanks for the development of concepts and doctrines specific could well follow the example of the USNWC, the Concepts and Doctrine Center in the RN, and the FRS Foundation for Strategic Research in France. To this should be added the bottom-up approach where captains of warships can contribute their experiences to be written into doctrine. For example, on counterinsurgent operations, coastguard and constabulary roles and geo-strategic shifts with new instruments such as missiles, drones and cyber. That might be akin to improving overall efficiency by promoting harmony between the quarter-deck and the boiler room and raising executive officers' awareness of the technical realities of the steam age. The alternative would end in blind herd instinct and battle failure.

Beyond these beginnings, sooner or later cadets provided with the right directions in their education will light up a renaissance. And not just about points of view such as Corbett's and Mahan's conceptualizations on decisiveness, naval control, and victory.

Being educated to look at the maritime space holistically with the full and proper examination of any conceptualizations tends towards serendipity when in combat or engaged in maritime security roles including naval diplomacy. The value of a maritime space also includes protecting the country's way of life and economic resources.

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### **Notes on Contributor:**

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