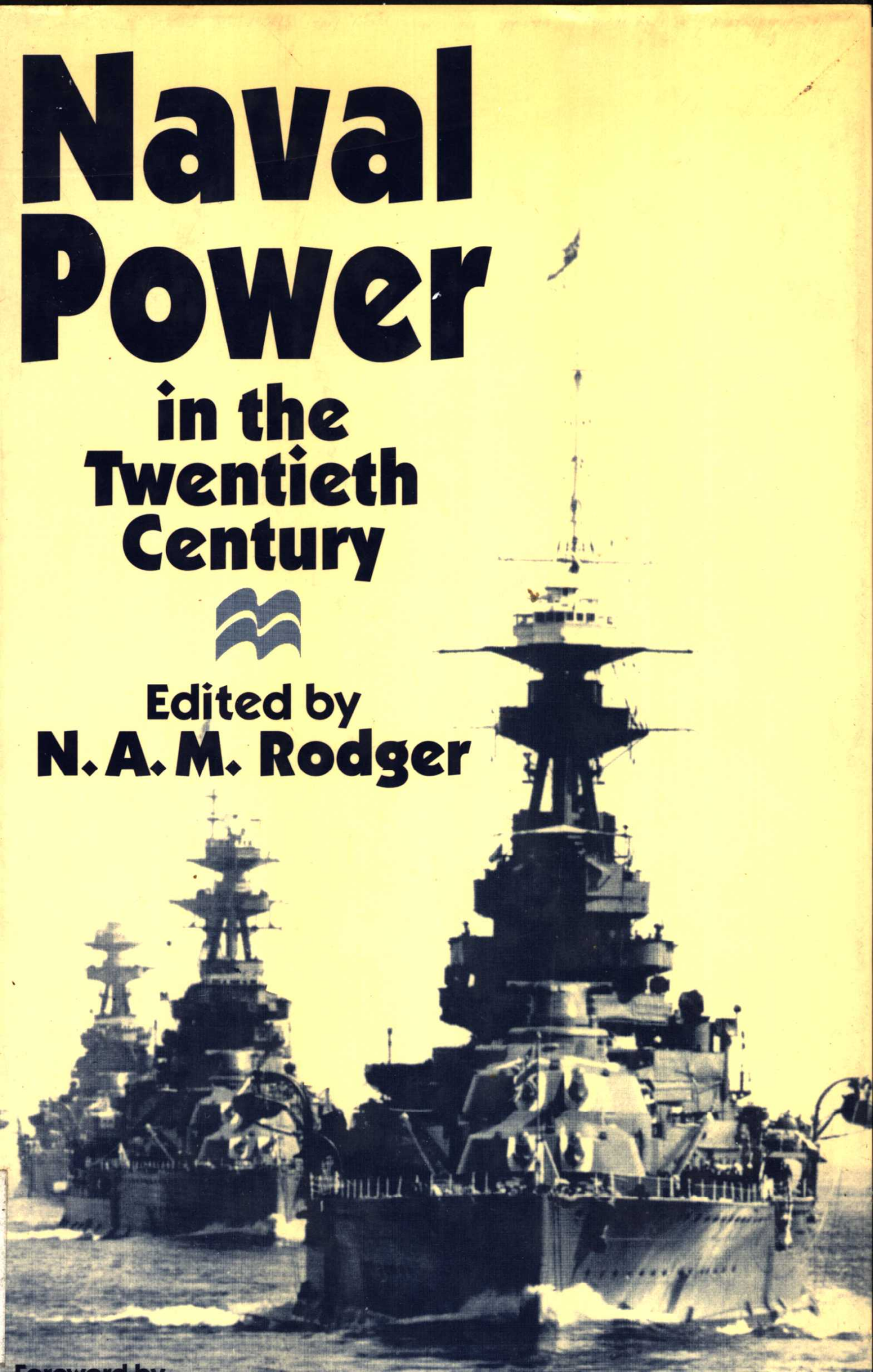
# Naval Power in the Twentieth Century



Edited by
N. A. M. Rodger

# Naval Power in the Twentieth Century

Edited by

N. A. M. Rodger

Foreword by

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Julian Oswald GCB



MACMILLAN



First published 1996 by
MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

ISBN 0–333–64413–1 hardcover

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
05 04 03 02 01 00 99 98 97 96

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Antony Rowe Ltd
Chippenham, Wiltshire

# NAVAL POWER IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

# List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AA | Anti-Aircraft |
| AOC-in-C | Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief |
| ASW | Anti-Submarine Warfare |
| BA-MA | Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv [Freiburg-im-Breisgau & Potsdam] |
| BL | British Library |
| CID | Committee of Imperial Defence |
| C-in-C | Commander-in-Chief |
| CNO | Chief of Naval Operations [of the USN] |
| CNS | Chief of Naval Staff |
| CSM | Comité Supérieure de la Marine |
| DF | Direction Finding |
| EEC | European Economic Community |
| FAA | Fleet Air Arm |
| HF/DF | High-Frequency Direction Finding |
| HMS | Her/His Majesty's Ship |
| IAF | Indian Air Force |
| IN | Indian Navy |
| IRBM | Inter-Regional Ballistic Missile |
| JCS | Joint Chiefs of Staff |
| MAS | Motoscafo Antisommergibile *or* Motoscafo Armato con Silurante |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation |
| NID | Naval Intelligence Division [of the British Naval Staff] |
| NRN | Netherlands Royal Navy |
| NSHQ | Naval Service Head Quarters [of Canada] |
| PN | Pakistan Navy |
| PRO | Public Record Office [London] |
| RAF | Royal Air Force |
| RAN | Royal Australian Navy |
| RCAF | Royal Canadian Air Force |
| RCN | Royal Canadian Navy |
| RIN | Royal Indian Navy |
| RN | Royal Navy |
| RPN | Royal Pakistan Navy |
| SEATO | South-East Asia Treaty Organisation |
| SHM | Service Historique de la Marine [Vincennes] |

| | |
|---|---|
| SLOC | Sea Lines of Communication |
| SSBN | Nuclear submarine armed with ballistic missiles |
| SSN | Nuclear submarine |
| STOVL | Short Take-Off, Vertical Landing |
| UN | United Nations |
| USN | United States Navy |
| VSTOL | Vertical or Short Take-Off and Landing |
| WEU | Western European Union |

# Acknowledgements

This book prints the proceedings of a conference held at the University of Exeter in July 1994. It could not have happened without the support of the University, and the hard work of Dr Peter Morris who managed it. The organisers of the conference wish also to thank D. M. L. Plymouth for supporting the Conference and providing a visit to Devonport Dockyard, and the British Academy for a grant in aid.

# Foreword

## Julian Oswald

There could hardly have been a more auspicious or appropriate time to call a major international conference on the parameters of naval power; as the world, newly emerged from the dark shadows of the Cold War, opens its eyes to the stark reality that all is not sweetness and light, and that threats and challenges to peace and security abound. Sadly, aggression is alive and well. In *World Conflicts* (London, 1989), Patrick Brogan estimates that since 1945 at least 80 wars have resulted in the deaths of some 15 to 20 million people (the very imprecision is frightening). Not one of these deaths was directly caused by the superpowers' struggle.

So, although the focus of this historical conference was inevitably on past events, it had special relevance and importance in providing pointers for the future. Partially at least this is because there is a certain recurring continuity in the uses of and requirements for maritime power. To be more specific, the post Cold War challenges see the emphasis moving away from possible deep ocean or blue water operations, the main concern of the last 45 years, towards the coastal or littoral use of sea power, which featured so strongly in naval annals in previous centuries.

The question posed by strategists, analysts and planners to historians, therefore centres on how navies should be organised, equipped, trained, supported, deployed and employed in the light of the historians' views of current challenges to security world-wide. Historians cannot, of course, provide a complete answer to such questions; political, financial and technical factors are also relevant. But the historians can advise when, why and in what manner the tea leaves were misread in the past.

One oft-discussed aspect of sea power is whether it is or was being used offensively or defensively. Of course the two sides in a particular theatre may consider their stance to be quite different. In the Battle of the Atlantic, 1939–43, for example, German naval operations were clearly offensive, those of the Allies defensive. But the operations of Allied anti-submarine hunter-killer groups were at least tactically offensive too. Whether NATO Maritime force operations in the Adriatic in support of the United Nations in the former Yugoslavia are offensive or defensive is a moot point.

To what extent can maritime forces exert a decisive leverage on events ashore? Very little in the case of the Second World War German offensive against Russia; a great deal in the 1991 Gulf War. But as the range, striking power and accuracy of carrier-borne aircraft, and perhaps particularly of sea-launched cruise missiles, increase, we can I think expect to see maritime forces exerting influence in more and more cases. Not least this will be because of the inherent ability of navies to provide presence and punch without the political difficulties and uncertainties of stationing and committing land troops – involving potential embroilment.

I believe it is important to signal one particular potential trap. It is clearly the case that navies will carry a steadily increasing proportion of the world's declining nuclear arsenal. The United Kingdom's position – phasing out land based systems – is a plausible precedent. Even where other countries retain some land systems the number is likely to be sharply reduced. There must exist at least a slight danger that in such circumstances some strategists will try to extend the well-thought-through, well-understood concepts of nuclear deterrence to its conventional younger brother. This would be a serious mistake. Nuclear deterrence worked. Conventional deterrence has failed, not of course always, but on more than one occasion with serious results. We need look no further than the 1991 Gulf War to see that Saddam Hussein, faced by the military might of most of the rest of the world, was not deterred, even when the destruction of a large part of his strength was inescapable.

Another aspect of naval operations on which a historian's perspective is particularly helpful is the problem, for such it is for the commander at sea, of political control. Van Tromp, de Grasse, Hawke and Nelson knew or cared little about Rules of Engagement. Their unequivocal objective was the total destruction of the enemy. As late as the Second World War the concept of Rules of Engagement as such was virtually non-existent. Now, especially in lower-level confrontational situations, tight political control is crucial. Any suggestion that it is inadequate is very sensitive politically – but this inevitably results in lack of freedom of decision on the spot. The fact that a wrong move, sometimes even an inauspicious word, will be on the world's screens, courtesy of CNN, in minutes, has a very real and direct effect on the employment of force. Inevitably political vacillation and delay will make achievement of the military objective more difficult and less certain. We need, with the help of history, to understand this trend and anticipate its further development.

Some may feel that only the rich can play at sea-power and dismiss it as irrelevant, and therefore wasteful, for other countries. Others will argue that the leverage of sea power can be very great, and at modest cost – the

whole sweep of British Naval history might be held to support this later view. Some components of sea power – super-carriers for example – are clearly well beyond the reach of almost all countries. But there are very much cheaper naval systems now freely available – small missile firing fast patrol boats, quiet modern conventional submarines and, perhaps the best example of all, sea mines, which even since 1945 have had a seriously damaging and delaying effect on the world's largest navy more than once.

I suppose the real difficulty for most of us is that we have spent much of our conscious lives in the shadow of the Cold War, the great superpower stand-off, and that biggest non-event of history, global nuclear war. If navies are to be sensibly structured for the decades ahead we will require a great deal of help from historians and others who understand how things were in the centuries which preceded this historically brief period. It really would be a terrible mistake to carry our Cold War experience and thinking directly forward to the twenty-first century. But there is a very real danger that we will do so – and of course not all the lessons and experiences of the last 50 years are irrelevant.

I believe that papers from the 1994 Exeter Conference which follow carry many of the essential verities of naval power in the twentieth century and, taken in context, should provide helpful pointers for the twenty-first.

Julian Oswald

# Notes on the Contributors

**George W. Baer** is Chairman of the Department of Strategy and Policy, and Alfred Thayer Mahan Professor of Maritime Strategy, at the US Naval War College. His most recent book is *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890–1990.*

**Correlli Barnett** is Fellow and former Keeper of the Archives of Churchill College Cambridge. His many books include *The Collapse of British Power, The Audit of War* and *Engage the Enemy more Closely: The Royal Navy in the Second World War.*

**Daniel A. Baugh** is Professor of Modern British History at Cornell University, and author of *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole*, and *Naval Administration 1715–1750.* He has written on government and society in England, 1660–1830, especially on the relief of the poor. During the past decade his articles and essays have been chiefly concerned with the maritime, financial and imperial aspects of British defence policy from the sixteenth to twentieth century.

**Hervé Coutau-Bégarie** is director of studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études and director of the 'cycle de stratégie' at the Collège Interarmes de Défense. He is a former President of the Commision Française d'Histoire Maritime, and the author of numerous works on naval strategy.

**David Brown** has been head of the Naval Historical Branch of the British Ministry of Defence for seventeen years.

**W. A. B. (Alec) Douglas** served in the Royal Canadian Navy from 1950 to 1973, then was head of the official histories programme of the Canadian Armed Services until 1994. He has published among other things *Out of the Shadows: Canada in the Second World War* (with B. Greenhous), and *The Creation of a National Airforce: The Official History of the RCAF* Vol. II.

**Dr Michael Epkenhans** is Research Fellow of the Reichspräsident-Friedrich-Ebert Memorial Foundation at Heidelberg, and honorary lecturer at Heidelberg University. He is the author of *Die wilhelminische Flottenrüstung 1908–1914* (soon to be published in English), and the forthcoming *Admiral Albert Hopman, 1865–1942. Tagebücher, Briefe, Aufzeichnungen.*

**Commander James Goldrick, RAN**, a former International Research Fellow at the US Naval War College, is at present Executive Officer of

HMAS *Perth*. He is the author of *The King's Ships were at Sea*, and the editor of *Reflections on the Royal Australian Navy* and (with John B. Hattendorf) *Mahan is not Enough.*

**Eric Grove** is a former lecturer in strategic studies at the Royal Naval College Dartmouth, Naval Research Director of the Foundation for International Security, and Research Fellow of the University of Southampton. His books include *Vanguard to Trident: British Naval Policy since 1945, The Future of Sea Power* and *Maritime Strategy and European Security*. He is now senior lecturer in Politics and Deputy Director of the Centre for Security Studies at the University of Hull.

**Rear-Admiral Richard Hill** retired from the Royal Navy in 1983. He has written six books, including *Maritime Strategy for Medium Powers*, and edited the *Oxford Illustrated History of the Royal Navy*. He is editor of *The Naval Review* and Chairman of the Society for Nautical Research.

**Dr Andrew Lambert** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of War Studies at King's College, London. His books include *The Crimean War: British Grand Strategy against Russia 1853–1856,* and *The Last Sailing Battlefleet: Maintaining Naval Mastery 1815–1850.*

**Dr Nicholas Lambert** was until recently an Olin Fellow at Yale University, and now holds a Charter Fellowship at Wolfson College, Oxford.

**Ian Nish** is Professor Emeritus of International History in the London School of Economics and Political Science.

**Admiral of the Fleet Sir Julian Oswald** retired from the Royal Navy in 1993 after a career of 46 years, culminating in four years as First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff.

**Captain Werner Rahn**, Federal German Navy, is Commanding Officer of the Militärgeschichtliche Forschungsamt, Potsdam. He is the author of *Reichsmarine und Landesverteidigung, 1991–1928*, and joint editor of the *Kriegstagebuch der Seekriegsleitung 1939–1945.*

**Dr N. A. M. Rodger** is Anderson Fellow of the National Maritime Museum and Honorary Research Fellow of the Centre for Maritime Historical Studies of the University of Exeter. His published work includes *The Wooden World, An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* and *The Insatiable Earl, A Life of John Montagu Fourth Earl of Sandwich.*

**David Rosenberg** is an Associate Professor of Modern Military and Diplomatic History at Temple University, and a Lieutenant-Commander USNR. He has published widely on post-Second World War military and naval history and on the history of nuclear strategy. He is at present editing a book on the Berlin Crisis of 1958–62, writing a biography of Admiral Arleigh Burke, and a history of concepts, plans and policies for a future world war from 1945 to 1990.

**James J. Sadkovich** is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin who has published a number of studies of modern Italy and Yugoslavia, including *The Italian Navy in World War II.*

**Michael Simpson** is a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Wales, Swansea, and Hon. General Editor of the Navy Records Society. He has written extensively on British and American naval history in the twentieth century, and edited volumes on Anglo-American Naval Relations and the papers of Sir James Somerville.

**G. Teitler** is Professor of Military History and Strategic Studies at the Royal Naval College and Royal Military Academy of the Netherlands, and author of *Vlootvoogd in de knel: Vice-Admiraal A. S. Pinke tussen de marinestaf, Indië en de Indonesische revolutie.*

**Geoffrey Till** is Professor and head of the Department of History and International Affairs at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, and Visiting Professor in Maritime Studies in the Department of War Studies, King's College London. He has written among other books, *Air Power and the Royal Navy, Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age, Modern Sea Power,* and (with Bryan Ranft) *The Sea in Soviet Strategy.*

# Introduction

N. A. M. Rodger

A hundred years ago the influence of sea power on current affairs was an accepted fact. The sensational success of Alfred T. Mahan's book *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660–1783*[1] and its successors,[2] made naval power the most fashionable and potent of all weapons in the statesman's armoury. Mahan was not primarily a theorist, and his works have to be read with care to extract his ideas on when, where and how sea power could be used to effect, but it is the fate of fashionable books to be read hastily and carelessly more often than with attention, and cited more often than read.[3] His contemporaries like P. H. Colomb, Sir John Laughton, Sir Julian Corbett and Sir Herbert Richmond,[4] each of whom added dimensions to naval history which Mahan had not laid open, never equalled him in popular appeal. Corbett in particular, whose ideas of naval strategy remain valuable and influential today,[5] addressed them primarily to a naval and scholarly readership, and had much difficulty in carrying the naval men with him. His subtle and searching evocation of the ways and circumstances in which sea power had actually been used and useful in the past, carried much less weight with naval opinion than the simple idea which they found in Mahan that one great battle solved every problem. At the end of his life, and at the height of his powers and reputation as an historian and theorist, Corbett was publicly rebuked by the Board of Admiralty for suggesting that naval warfare could or should take any other direction than the decisive battle leading presently to command of the sea.[6]

The lesson the public derived from Mahan was that sea power consisted above all in a battle-fleet, whose function was to meet and defeat the fleet of the enemy in a decisive action. From victory would flow unnumbered, and often unspecified, blessings. The possession of a fleet, it was often assumed, was a talisman of great-power status; necessary, even perhaps sufficient, for the aspiring candidate to that eminence. It was no accident that this idea sprang from the popularity of Mahan's books, for one of his main underlying objects was undoubtedly to persuade his compatriots that they could never take their place in the front rank of nations until the United States Navy was equal to the greatest fleets of the world. This was

not an easy argument to advance in strictly logical terms, for it was an inescapable fact that a small, weak and obsolete navy had not (since 1814) exposed the United States to any external danger, nor hampered its rapid economic rise. It therefore suited Mahan's purpose, as well as his genius, to present his case by implication rather than plain statement.

The Russo-Japanese War reinforced the more simplistic Mahanian views, but the First World War delivered a severe blow to them. Dominant sea power had failed to solve all the problems of Britain and her allies; the Grand Fleet had experienced great difficulty both in fighting and in winning the decisive battle for which it had been created. For all the claims advanced after the war for the effectiveness of naval blockade as the weapon which had really brought Germany to her knees, the stark fact remained that Britain had for the first time in her history been forced to raise a mass army and deploy it on the Continent. This had major political as well as strategic implications. The losses of the war – overwhelmingly military losses on the Western Front – bred a revulsion against war and armaments of all sorts which is with us yet. Moreover Kitchener's New Army shaped the political consciousness of its generation. From being a nation of civilians with some awareness of sea power, the British became a nation of infantrymen, and arguably remained so during and after the Second World War, with the experience of military service ('military' in both senses for the majority) prolonged into the 1960s. This war, too, though fortunate for sea power in general, gave much less comfort to the simple Mahanians. Decisive battles had been relatively few, and in several of the most decisive campaigns the main fleets had been notably absent. So far from being an autonomous and decisive weapon, the fleets seemed to have worked to best effect in conjunction with the other services, as enablers and guarantors of victory rather than the direct instruments of it.

By 1945 the only country in which simple Mahanism could still be said to maintain its intellectual credibility was the United States. This was natural enough, for the USN was not only the chief beneficiary of Mahan's ideas, but by then the dominant world sea power, and the only navy which had recently won anything like traditional fleet actions. Even so it was the admirals rather than educated public opinion which kept up the faith. For a sceptical outsider like Henry Stimson, the Navy Department 'frequently seemed to retire from the realm of logic into a dim religious world in which Neptune was God, Mahan his prophet, and the United States Navy the only true church'.[7] The USN was not alone in needing a new and more cogent intellectual justification for sea power. But no second Mahan arose in the 1950s. Sea power remained, as it had been between the wars, a matter of professional debate behind closed doors between naval staffs

and politicians. It was no longer a question of vital public interest, and historians (seldom immune to the currents of fashion) generally ignored it.

Not until 1976, when Paul M. Kennedy published *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*,[8] did a serious scholar present a coherent study of the whole of British naval history which went far to replace Mahan's explanations, or implications. Kennedy emphasised the economic impact of sea power; always the most expensive and burdensome of all the state's activities, a navy could only justify itself when it 'paid its way' by assuring and protecting the sources of the nation's wealth. For Britain, sea power had made possible a rise to greatness which was founded on overseas trade and investment. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, Britain's economic lead was slipping towards countries (notably Germany and the United States) with better-endowed and more flexible economies, and the naval trident, he argued, was bound to follow. Kennedy also adopted arguments drawn from the Edwardian geographer Sir Halford Mackinder, suggesting that sea power in general (not just British power in particular) had derived its unique importance from economic circumstances which were passing away. So long as water transport preserved its economic advantages of cheapness, security and flexibility, littoral states were bound to dominate the fragmented and disunited economies of the interior with their high transport costs and numerous political and technical barriers to trade. The rise of the great land empires, however, and the spread of railways, would inevitably erode if not destroy the advantage of commercial shipping, and consequently of sea power.

Kennedy's interpretation was intellectually vastly more coherent than Mahan's, and its message that economics drives history, and that naval and imperial power belonged to the past, was readily acceptable, especially in Britain. It still has powerful advocates, even in this volume, but it is already beginning to show signs of strain. The collapse of Marxism has done nothing to strengthen the status of economic history as a teleology. The transport costs of railways remain stubbornly higher than those of ships, even when the ships have to cover much greater distances to reach their destinations. The inevitable triumph of the great land empires is looking a great deal less inevitable now that only the United States and (barely) China survive at all as unitary states. At the same time naval and military history have regained much of the public interest and intellectual respectability which they lacked for so many years, and new ideas and theories are coming forward. Colin S. Gray has published an impressive study arguing that in wars between a dominant land power and a dominant sea power, history shows the sea power consistently to have certain decisive advantages.[9] Rather than winning wars by winning battles, in the

Mahanian style, his sea power buys time for recovery. It preserves a defensive position and allows it to build up its strength while the land power exhausts and dissipates its own. In a global war of attrition, sea power is staying power.

This is a powerful argument, but it applies to a single, admittedly important, case. Like Mahan and Kennedy, it takes its text chiefly (though not only) from the experience of Britain as the leading case of a country whose rise to be a great power, and a great naval power, went hand in hand. It addresses itself to the distinctively British, and later American, problem of the dominant naval power facing a victorious land power. It does not claim to advance any universal theory of sea power.

Nor does this volume, but its focus is on sea power at large. The experience of a century of naval war has taught us many ways in which Mahan's ideas were inadequate and superficial, but it cannot be said that we have today any general explanation of how naval power works and why it is important which can credibly be applied to many different nations and navies (not just the British and the Americans) in the circumstances of the past and the present. The object of the conference (held at the University of Exeter in July 1994) whose proceedings are printed here was to look back over the century in search of some ideas out of which such a general theory of naval power might be constructed. The participants were selected and instructed to look at the experience of each of the major navies of this century, and some of the lesser ones, in order to examine what navies could and could not do; how, and why, and where sea power worked, or did not work. How far did naval power make nations great, and keep them great; to what extent was it an offensive weapon which won wars, or a defensive weapon which ensured national survival; what strategic objects in war and political objects in peace could be best, or only, met by a navy? Looking at the experience of different navies, we tried to work towards broad conclusions about which countries got value, or could have got value, from the money invested in their fleets, and which wasted it in pursuit of the irrelevant or the unobtainable. Would some countries have been better off to have saved the burden on their economies which building a fleet entailed? Did natural land powers waste their strength on chimerical naval ambitions, or natural sea powers drain their resources into futile continental campaigns? Can navies ever defeat armies, and should they try? These and the like questions were addressed to the experience of different countries; some of them over the whole century, some of them in the light of particular campaigns.

We cannot claim to have provided definitive answers to such large questions, but at least the volume clears much ground. Some conclusions