

A Century of Perspective on Naval Strategy

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A hundred years ago today, America entered the First World War. An allied victory was not a foregone conclusion and many in the business lobby were hostile given British practices of shipping interception and inspection in the North Sea. Germany's strategic mishandling of the submarine offensive reversed these opinions.

Successful strategic planning depends on context. The current lack of clarity from Washington is causing inevitable obstacles for the successful implementation of CS21R. U.S. policy towards both rivals and partners is vague: witness flip-flops on "One China" and on the Israel "Two state" policies. The need for secretary of Defense Mattis and secretary of State Tillerson to underline unquestioned U.S. backing for NATO and Europe came after the BREXIT vote when a key underpinning of European co-operation was eroded and an important component of NATO already weakened. Turkey or the Philippines' recent behavior is equally dangerous. Now is the time to push hard – in partnership with NATO – for restructuring and reform, to build on, rather than erode the alliance.

Lessons from Jutland

Centuries prior to Jutland, Britain possessed a well-oiled global maritime fighting machine. The Royal Navy had a vast infrastructure and a total belief in its own invincibility. Unchallenged for a hundred years, it was steeped in tradition when it had its nose bloodied by its younger German rival. Tradition had become a millstone against a relatively "legacy-free" opponent. In peace, the RN had developed into a bureaucratic, seniority-based institution. Command initiative and tactical risk were almost non-existent. Today - after years of relative inaction - the USN faces similar threats.

The successful maintenance of economic blockade through sea power was a key British war objective in 1914. Despite Jutland's controversial tactical disappointment, the battle still changed the war's outcome. Unrestricted submarine warfare provoked U.S. entry into the war. The German Navy may still have had the impact of a "Fleet in being", but its demoralization led to its eventual mutiny and its final act of self-immolation in Scapa Flow in 1919. Anglo-American naval parity quickly followed. None of these outcomes could have been predicted a week after Jutland.

The Role of History

History gives a wider context to the study of military strategy, historians and strategists each playing a role. The view from the outside can bring wider clarity, which the inside-out perspective might overlook. The outside view – the historian's view - may be less expert, less knowledgeable but may see a wider horizon. A healthy overlap, a balance, is needed. The inevitable politicization of today's War on Terror could lead us back to a McNamara-like obsession with body-count numbers, sound-bytes, and media-friendly metrics. We're largely missing strategic metrics in the public discussion. A painful reminder is that the Napoleonic wars continued for ten years after Trafalgar; the First World War continued for two years after Jutland.

Under Fisher's far-sighted stewardship, the RN's strategic focus shifted from the Mediterranean to the North Sea to face Germany, the new economic powerhouse of Europe, and then widened to also include the Atlantic with the submarine war of 1917. The U.S. is similarly shifting focus in the first part

of the 21st century from the Atlantic to the Pacific where it faces accelerated naval growth from an increasingly economically powerful China.

China is the serious long-term threat. Russia is the short-term one. Name the world's top ten technology, banking or communications companies. Not one is Russian. They're Chinese. Russia's floundering economy uses external conflict for internal political gain. A *Lager* mentality. Fighting a common outside enemy to unite (or quash) diverse internal opposition. Despite China's "nine dotted line" strategy and huge PLA/N investments, one question may be: is the U.S. shift to the Pacific premature? Arguably, we face an equal, but more immediate threat in the Mediterranean and Baltic regions. We might also face a new medium-term threat in the Arctic sea where increased commercial conflict over oil, mineral, and fishing rights plus a new channel through which China's navy can threaten, represents a more potential for conflict.

Jellicoe and the U.S. Navy

When political support is not seen as being stable, personal contacts within the military become more important for intelligence, planning and training. Jellicoe and Sims' friendship went back to China, to 1900. Jellicoe not only trusted Sims, he also knew – I suspect – that he could use the friendship as a conduit through which to speedily obtain urgently needed U.S. resources. Intelligence was never held back (though Admiral Benson, whose unfavorable opinions towards the British were as strong as Sims' favorable opinions were, often doubted this). Jellicoe probably "laid it on" (in much the same way as he did in early 1917 with Lloyd George's War Cabinet. He felt most cabinet members did not understand just how close Britain was to defeat at that point of the war). Operations are driven by intelligence. During Jellicoe's time at the Admiralty, Intelligence-sharing was encouraged and Sims's friendship with Reginald "Blinker" Hall (who became DNI in 1914) gave Sims further, unparalleled access to Britain's Room 40, its naval intelligence group. The current feud between the Executive branch and the Intelligence Community is, therefore, extremely dangerous.

A mere 26 days after the battle, Sims received Jellicoe's written evaluation of Jutland and was able to use this knowledge to brief SECNAV Daniels. Sim's priority in 1917 was to provide resources as fast as possible. The first group to arrive in Queenstown on May 6th were the best available, war-ready ships the USN possessed. The USN hadn't been ready for war and other ships had to make up for the shortfall in crews. Today, how ready – *really* ready – are we? One hears so many stories of hardware malfunctions, lack of realistic battle training and bureaucratic inertia that it's difficult to feel confidence from the outside.

Personal relationships between rival services give insight into an adversary's people, technologies and tactics. The working relationships between the U.S. Coast Guard and their Chinese counterpart is an opportunity on which to expand to foster stronger relationships between USN and NATO navy officers and their counterparts in the PLA/N. Sims accepted the RN's existing command structure and put his own ships under their direct command to avoid any time-wasting. He also accepted British war doctrine given Britain's two and a half years' war experience. It made sense. Are we as pragmatic and flexible today as Sims was then?

Credibility is key to effective deterrence. After only ten years, Jutland signaled the slow decline of the *Dreadnought* although both our navies' reliance continued without clear alternatives. The carrier age was born in 1918-1919 but only really came of age twenty years later in the Pacific. It is interesting that both ship-types share many of the same questions of prestige, cost, public profile and risk. The low cost, range and killing power of today's ship-killer missile threat might constitute a higher credible threat to our navies than we care to admit. Much like the maligned idea of submarine warfare in 1914, or the torpedo that might have failed to deliver the goods at Jutland, but in later years fully developed into a lethal weapon.

Jutland's real value was its controversial outcome. Many nostalgically look back to Nelson: navy men like Lord West, Andrew Gordon, Roskill and, even one of your own, Holloway Frost. Others talk

more to the strategic context of the battle, like historian Arthur Marder. There's great emotional and media appeal to talk of "engaging the enemy more closely" versus Jellicoe's more cerebral command style. I often wonder what a Jellicoe-Beatty team might have been like had JRJ been Beatty's Chief of Staff instead of his C-in-C. Beatty's intuition tempered by Jellicoe's intellect might have been a superb combination. I also wonder whether we would have ever had the degree of soul-searching and consequent reform had Jutland been a more easily understood "victory".

The Second Trafalgar

The challenge last year, in Jutland's Centenary year, was how to communicate the battle's significance and place in British maritime tradition. We wanted to pass its history onto a new generation. Did we succeed? Not entirely. But we made strong progress.

I do not feel that the Royal Navy fully grasped that Jutland was the obvious hook that could be the opportunity for, or the event around which the service could explain its current role to the public and to use this to lobby for a larger share of defense dollars. Britain is a country that has largely forgotten its maritime tradition. The naval role in a globalized, "Just-in-time" economy is now more important than ever. There was a high risk that Jutland was going to be overwhelmed by a tsunami of media attention to the land war, to Gallipoli, the Somme, to Verdun. To the generation lost in the filth and intimate brutality of trench war. The war at sea left no scars. The battlefield of the sea washed away the evidence. The slow strangulation of the German war economy was not easily understood, held little glamour and equally difficult to communicate to a nation whose understanding of war was romanticized and fed by a media which contributed to the unrealistic expectations of a "decisive battle" at sea.

The fundamental communication consideration today is language: to preserve history with a new generation, we must engage audiences digitally, be visually and graphically enticing. Look at how your own children consume media. Not how you do. While I hate to say it, the printed word is increasingly irrelevant. My simple 24-minute Jutland animation that was shown here last year when Jutland was gamed made – literally - 200 times more impact than my book. For both the layman and, I dare say, even some in the military, this complex battle and its consequences were finally easier to grasp. Museums in Germany, the UK and Denmark that had never even met, partnered and found a new way to share content, artifacts and tools. This is the new way going forward to recount history and its lessons.