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President's Notes: Challenge!

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CHALLENGE !

The vital relation between a nation's security and its ability to protect and control its sea lines of communications (LOC's) was articulately set forth almost a century ago by Alfred Thayer Mahan. As events of the 20th century were to show—especially the World Wars I and II campaigns in the Atlantic—his writings proved prophetic to the point that, today, they have virtually become irrefutable.

The British blockade which was threatening to bring World War I Germany to its knees prompted the unconditional submarine warfare which soon thrust our Nation into war. As the Kaiser's admirals all too clearly recognized, only by cutting Britain's crucial Atlantic supply lines could that tiny island power be starved before her own blockade destroyed Germany. Two decades later the viability of Britain's lines of supply from the United States was again crucial to her withstanding another German onslaught. The attack on the U.S. convoy destroyers *Greer* and *Kearney* and the sinking of *Reuben James* occurred during our valiant pre-Pearl Harbor efforts. The goal: to keep shipping and our lend lease aid getting through to the British Isles.

Today, the fact that over 95 percent of the material used in support of the effort in Southeast Asia travels by sea once again attests to the vital importance of open sea LOC's.

The need to protect and control one's own sea LOC's should be readily apparent to the military commander and to anyone who appreciates the historic role of logistics in support of national security. Clearly the United States today faces a challenge to its ability to safeguard these vital sea routes. Until recent years our Navy



exercised undisputed control of all the seas and oceans of the world. Our capability vis-a-vis a potential enemy was undisputed, unquestioned. Today we find ourselves at the beginning of a new chapter in our naval history, one in which we obviously will be limited in what we can do unilaterally.

Last spring's Soviet naval exercise Okean not only highlighted the efficiency of the modern Soviet Navy, but it also demonstrated this fleet's worldwide operational capability under highly sophisticated and centralized command and control systems. A formidable armada of some 200 ships, including 50 submarines, plus substantial air and ground units combined in the largest Russian naval deployment outside of home waters since the Czar's fleet sailed to defeat at Tsushima in 1905. Conducted simultaneously on three oceans and nine seas, the exercise illustrated and supported an earlier boast by Admiral Gorshkov, the Soviet naval Commander-in-Chief, that the "U.S.S.R. has a naval fleet and aviation equal to any strategic task . . . on all the oceans of the world." The lesson of Okean is clear. The Soviets are now clearly capable of interdicting our free world sea LOC's.

This new shift in the balance of power at sea necessitates a long, hard look at what can be done to insure that those sea LOC's are never closed by either Soviet force or blackmail tactics.

In short, it requires that we articulate in unmistakably clear terms our own role and that of our allies.

The emphasis on the role that our allies must play represents a clear departure from the years since 1945 during which we were unilaterally ready, willing, and able to carry the collective responsibility of keeping the essential world sea LOC's open—it was taken for granted. But we face today's world with both a reduced capability and the challenge of a large Soviet Navy, and it is in this setting that the role of our friends takes on new and critical proportions. The synergistic advantage of our working together is obvious. Having discussed in some detail various aspects of allied naval cooperation in previous "Challenges," I would like to concentrate here on another dimension which will be essential to making a reality of the concept.

Specifically, I refer to the need to articulate a logical formula by which all the world's sea LOC's can be assessed, thereby providing a measure of their respective importance delineated in terms of the various interests and needs of the United States and its many free world partners.

For instance, the inviolability of certain sea LOC's is absolutely vital to the national security of this Nation because of the role they play in insuring economic, political, and strategic contact with our major allies, both Western European and Asian. These sea LOC's include those joining Western Europe and the United States across the North Atlantic, as well as those between our west coast and our great Pacific friends, Japan and Australia. And since control of the LOC through the Mediterranean is key to the viability of the southern flank of NATO, it too must be considered of vital interest. Here also might be included those sealanes over which strategic materials essential to the United States are carried, e.g., oil from Venezuela. In assessing the value of

these sealanes, I would assign them an "A" designator, indicating their utmost importance as far as our national security is concerned.

Of secondary importance are those sea LOC's which are vital to our major allies. Because of the close relationship between the security of these allies and our own, these sealanes must be considered indirectly critical, if not vital, to this Nation. An example of this "B" type of sea LOC is the route connecting Western Europe and the Persian Gulf, around the Cape of Good Hope, a LOC by which our NATO allies derive a great majority of their essential oil requirements. Another is the lane connecting our ally, Japan, with Middle Eastern oil, extending south through the Straits of Malacca on through the Indian Ocean, a route over which travel some 90 percent of that nation's current oil imports. By the same token, while the sea LOC from Formosa to Malaysia is not in itself a vital or critical U.S. supply line, it is for our Formosan ally. Its importance is further enhanced for us, however, because it coincides with the Japanese-Persian Gulf sea LOC.

Finally, a third, or "C" type sea LOC, is one which may be important to one or more free world nations but which is vital or critical to neither the United States nor to one of those major allies whose national interests we identify as inherently so linked with our own. Such a sea line of communication might be the one connecting the nations of the east coast of Africa.

In an era in which the U.S. Navy is no longer the undisputed mistress of all the seas—both because of shifting domestic priorities and because of burgeoning Soviet maritime power—allied participation in guaranteeing the sanctity of free world sea LOC's is indispensable. Categorizing the various sea LOC's, and thereby clearly defining their relative individual importance in terms of both U.S. and allied interests, is an essential step in determining the final

disposition of our various naval forces which will be charged with protecting the "A" and "B" class sealanes.

Obviously, the greatest single U.S. naval effort will be concentrated on insuring the protection of the "A" class sea LOC's. It will be with these in mind that our newest ship and aircraft designs, weapons systems, operational procedures, and multinational arrangements must be developed. Priority would be given to the assignment of forces to this mission.

Secondly, in partnership with our major allies concerned with the defense of the "B" class sea LOC's, our role will be to take an active part in further developing and expanding those proven efforts in operational ASW cooperation that have been demonstrated so successfully within NATO. In expanding such nascent efforts beyond the North Atlantic Treaty sea areas, the role of the United States primarily will be to make available military hardware, essentially through foreign military sales, as well as technical advice and assistance. While U.S. ASW ships and aircraft might well be provided, they would be assigned on a strictly *partnership* basis. Leadership of the operations should preferably be non-U.S.

Thirdly would be U.S. concern for the "C" class of sea LOC's. Here, because of limitations on our own naval resources, our efforts would have to be restricted to military assistance in the form of hardware and technical training and education. There probably would be little or no direct U.S. participation.

There has been questioning in some quarters that too much faith may be being placed on the role of allies in supplementing our naval strength. I would submit, however, that for the sea control mission, which is the area most concerned with allied participation, it is not too much to expect that allies will respond with alacrity in protecting those sea LOC's which they deem *vital to their own interests*, their own national survival! However, the division of responsibility for sea line protection must be made clear to them.

The delineation between what should be considered U.S. unilateral responsibilities and what should be considered allied responsibilities in sharing the protection of vital sea LOC's is long overdue. Without a clear reordering of naval priorities, the United States runs the risk of overextending its self-assigned areas of responsibilities. In such a process it risks two dangers: diluting and weakening its ability to respond in defense of its own most vital interests; and offering a false sense of security to allies, who may be content to rely on an overcommitted U.S. Navy to protect *their* vital sea lines of communications.



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