

Maritime Strategy and policy for smaller navies

International Studies Association (San Diego Conference: 2012).

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Historians and naval thinkers have only slowly begun to understand that small navies have distinctive purposes, functions and characteristics in and of their own, and that they are neither the remnants of a past great power nor a curious emblem created on the way to great power status.¹

This paper focuses on small navies and seeks to examine the extent to which traditional approaches to maritime policy and strategy are relevant to them. It will examine alternative ways of defining what is meant by the term ‘small navy’ before addressing traditional interpretations about the roles and missions of navies, and of maritime strategy, in order to question the extent to which ‘small navies’ are different or distinct from their larger counterparts or, indeed, from each other. In terms of their size, capabilities and aspirations most navies are small. This is as true today as it has always been. Large navies dominate the headlines and receive ample coverage in both popular and academic publications but they are the exception not the rule. Their smaller counterparts have a lower profile except when they emerge as potential allies or enemies and there is a tendency to approach them in such terms, defining them by their relationship to larger navies regardless of whether this actually provides the most useful way in which to understand them. Equally, there is a tendency for historians and commentators to approach maritime strategy from a perspective built upon an examination of the activity of larger navies on the assumption that the resultant concepts and principles will apply to small navies as much as large ones. While this may be the case the relative paucity of literature devoted specifically to smaller navies makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions

The topic is of more than mere academic interest. Small navies may not hog the headlines but they play an important role in maritime strategy that extends beyond their engagement with larger navies. This can include their role in regional power balances, the conduct of independent operations in support of national policy, a contribution to multinational missions such as those designed to suppress piracy off the Horn of Africa, and apparently mundane but still vital constabulary roles in protecting and policing territorial waters and maintaining good order at sea. The salience of such roles within the context of current US Maritime Strategy has been reflected in the emphasis placed on maritime security operations and in the support provided to smaller navies through initiatives such as the Africa Partnership Station,

¹ John B. Hattendorf, ‘The US Navy and “Freedom of the Seas”, 1775-1917’ in Rolf Hobson & Tom Kristiansen, *Navies in Northern Waters 1721-2000*, (London: Frank Cass, 2004) pp.151-2

whereby the US Navy engages in a supportive relationship with African navies and security agencies.² Similarly, the European Union has emphasised the need to develop an integrated maritime policy in order to cater for maritime security and also for the renewable exploitation of the resources of the sea.³ Such initiatives, if they are to succeed, will depend on the contribution to be made by smaller navies. The subject thus has great contemporary relevance. Small navies may often have a low profile but they play an important role in local, regional and international security and they deserve greater attention than they have received to date. It may be foolish to assume that they are simply ‘scaled down’ versions of large navies.

Defining a ‘small navy’

In order to begin a discussion on this topic it is first necessary to define what is meant by the term ‘small navy’. This is not as easy as it might at first seem. Geoffrey Till, in one of the few scholarly articles to address this topic directly, reflected on the difficulty of categorisation in a situation where a small navy is not necessarily a weak one and a large navy is not necessarily powerful. Till suggested that definitions need to take account of the size and nature of the fleet, geographic range, function and capability, access to high-grade technology, and reputation.⁴ Matters are complicated by the fact that many navies might prefer not to be called ‘small’. Some prefer the title of ‘small state navy’ while the Royal New Zealand Navy prides itself on being the ‘best small nation navy’ in the world.⁵ Commentators linked to the Royal Norwegian Navy have written of the sea power of a ‘coastal state’, avoiding overt reference to the size of the navy.⁶ Such definitions are unhelpful in the context of this paper given that a small state or nation could, quite conceivably, have rather a large navy (as did the Portuguese in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the Dutch in the seventeenth) and a large state or nation may have a small navy (as did China until recently).

Size, defined in terms of the number of ships, does offer one route towards a definition but simply counting hull numbers provides a very inadequate indication of a navy’s role or capabilities. Different types of ships possess different characteristics and tend to fill different roles. In an environment that is centred on the operation of complex equipment and high-tech weaponry quality tends to count for more than quantity. Having more ships does not necessarily equate to greater power or capability.⁷ In any case, to define small navies simply as those with fewer ships than large navies first requires one to define what is large. By any measure the current US

² See US Navy, US Marine Corps, US Coastguard, *A Co-operative Strategy for the 21st Century*, (October, 2007). For details of the Africa Partnership Station see Commander US Naval Forces Africa, ‘Africa Partnership Station 2012’. <http://www.naveur-navaf.navy.mil/apshome.html>

³ For details of the EU Integrated Maritime Policy see http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/index_en.htm

⁴ Geoffrey Till, ‘Can small navies stay afloat?’ in *Jane’s Navy International*, May 2003.

⁵ RNZN 148, *Strategic Plan 2008-2025*.

⁶ For example see Jacob Borresen, ‘Coastal Power: The Sea Power of the Coastal State and the management of Maritime Resources’ in Hobson & Kristiansen, *Navies in Northern Waters*, pp.249-275.

⁷ For a discussion of the difficulty of assessing capability see Harold John Kearsley, ‘Rethinking maritime power theory’ in *Comparative Strategy*, 11:2, 195-211. Also see Norman Polmar, ‘The Measurement of Naval Strength in the Twenty-First Century’ in Andrew Dorman, Mike Lawrence Smith and Mathew Uttley, *The Changing Face of Maritime Power*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999) pp.126-136.

Navy is large, possessing a scale and range of capabilities denied to all others, but it is far from clear that this provides a useful measure against which to judge other navies. If there is one large navy and all others are small then that phrase is devoid of much meaning, particularly in situations where the size of the US Navy is not a relevant factor. If navies such as those of Britain and France (equipped with aircraft carriers, nuclear powered submarines, modern amphibious capabilities, sophisticated escort ships and a wide range of supporting assets) are compared to their American ally then they are clearly small, but when measured against most other navies they are decidedly large. They certainly do not consider themselves to be small and there is little evidence that they are viewed as such by most of their peers. The terms 'medium navy' or 'regional navy' are commonly used to describe the British, French, Indian and other navies with ambitions and capabilities larger than most, but smaller than the US Navy. This suggests the need for additional categories but does not contribute to an understanding of where the boundaries between such categories lie.

As Till noted, most attempts to classify navies seek to organise them into a hierarchy of power and capability.⁸ Some systems, by focusing solely on numbers, provide little of value beyond demonstrating that the author is able to count vessels listed in *Jane's Fighting Ships*.⁹ More satisfactory approaches incorporate qualitative as well as quantitative factors and produce a league table based on perceived power that might typically rank navies, as did Moore, in a hierarchy that includes the status symbol navy at the bottom and then moves to the coastal defence fleet, minor naval power, major naval power, and superpower as capabilities increase.¹⁰ Other systems include ownership of a particular weapons system, such as an aircraft carrier, as a marker for setting boundaries.¹¹ However, systems that assess combat capabilities in the absence of other factors are unsatisfactory as they say little about real capability and nothing about the role or tasks of a particular navy. Does possession of an ageing carrier with obsolete aircraft truly represent a significant indication of power and does it tell us anything about the likely missions of the ship? Of rather more use are approaches such as those suggested by Booth or Till, that reflect the ability (or otherwise) of a navy to project forces beyond its own territorial waters.¹² Such approaches link capability to intended role. Thus, an 'ocean-going navy', to use Booth's term, is distinct from a 'contiguous sea navy' not merely because of its particular capabilities but as a reflection of its geographical reach which is itself indicative of its role and ambition. In a similar vein Michael Morris developed a six-fold categorisation in his study of third-world navies in the 1980s¹³ and, building on such work, Eric Grove developed a nine-fold categorisation as follows¹⁴:

1. major global force projection navy – complete
2. major global force projection navy – partial
3. medium global force projection navy
4. medium regional force projection navy

⁸ Till, 'small navies'.

⁹ See Kearsley, pp.207-9

¹⁰ J.E. Moore (ed.), *Jane's Fighting Ships 1973-74* (London: Jane's Publishing, 1973) p.73.

¹¹ See Larson, quoted in Kearsley, p.208.

¹² Ken Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979) pp.120-121. Geoffrey Till, *Modern Seapower. An Introduction*, (London: Brassey's, 1987) p.47.

¹³ Michael Morris, *Expansion of Third World Navies*, (London: Macmillan, 1987) p.87.

¹⁴ Eric Grove, *The Future of Seapower*, (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.237-240.

5. adjacent force projection navy
6. offshore territorial defence navy
7. inshore territorial defence navy
8. constabulary navy
9. token navy.

Capabilities remain crucial to this system of categorisation but they are linked to the particular role and mission of the navies. Inshore territorial defence navies are structured and equipped as they are because of their particular role. If the role changes then so will the capabilities, insofar as resources allow, or, at the least, existing capabilities will be used in new ways to meet the new role.

Navies do not emerge ready formed from the ocean according to some divine plan nor are they built by accident, even if it sometimes looks as if they were. They are developed as the result of a series of choices associated with ideas about function, role and capability that are enabled or constrained by a variety of factors that are both tangible and intangible. Systems that look at capabilities alone tell us little as they seek to describe the result of a process without understanding the process itself. In truth it makes little sense to judge navies according to some objective standard without reference to their intended roles. Indeed, the attempt to do so can be misleading. Jeremy Black's warning against paradigm/diffusion models in military history is relevant here.¹⁵ Capability driven accounts ignore the importance of context and also of tasking. Capabilities may set the parameters of what can be achieved, but one cannot ignore the role of choice in deciding what it is that should be done and, equally, in determining which capabilities are developed and maintained.

Following this logic a satisfactory definition of a small navy will focus less on its size vis-à-vis other navies or on particular types of equipment and will instead reflect limits in the range of activities that such navies seek to fulfil and also on self image. Till makes the point rather well, '*small navies are different from large navies, partly because they have different ideas*'. Unfortunately he does not provide a clear definition of a small navy, perhaps because clarity is not possible. Small navies are simply navies with '*limited means and aspirations*.' Till argues that such navies have tended to have distinctive ideas about maritime strategy, being likely to focus on sea denial, commerce raiding and/or coastal defence rather than the '*blue-water*' concept of sea control.¹⁶ The difference here is one of role rather than specifically of size although the two are related. Smaller navies may focus on such roles because they are small and would, if they could, focus on sea control. Alternately one might equally argue that they are small because they focus on such roles.

The ability of the US Navy to make the transition from a smaller navy focusing on traditional small navy roles in the late nineteenth century to a large navy focused on sea control tasks in the early twentieth provides ample illustration of the manner in which a change in ambition and ideas may bring about a change in size and capability when ambition is met by appropriate means. The Imperial German Navy went through a similar transformation at roughly the same time although one could argue here that a continued focus on small navy roles would likely have served that state

¹⁵ Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History*, (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁶ Till, 'small navies' and Geoffrey Till, 'Series Editor's Preface', in Hobson & Kristiansen, *Navies and Northern Waters*, pp. (vii) – (viii)

much better. Sometimes the desire to follow a traditional path towards maritime power offers little strategic advantage.

Naval roles and missions

There have been numerous attempts to explain the factors that influence the development of maritime power and capability. Building on the work of Mahan, traditional approaches have suggested that geography, the availability of resources, the nature of the government and the perceptions and interests of the people all play a part in determining the extent and the nature of a state's engagement with the sea. Clearly there are tangible and intangible factors that input into the decision making process that decides naval policy. Harold Kearsley argued that these could be broadly identified as physical, economic and political inputs that were translated into subjective outputs (missions) and objective outputs (capabilities) having been filtered through the subjective decision making process (see figure 1).¹⁷

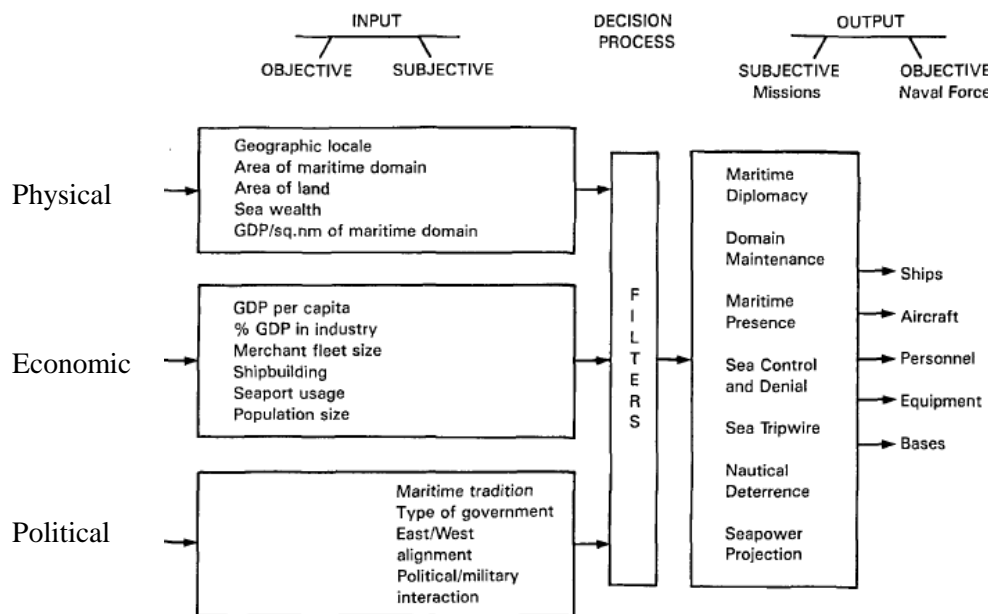


Figure 1. *Components of maritime power.* Harold Kearsley, (1992)

Kearsley argued that all navies, large and small, seek to fulfil all of the missions that he identified (maritime diplomacy, domain maintenance, maritime presence, sea control/denial, sea tripwire, nautical deterrence, seapower projection). Small navies may have different priorities to their larger counterparts and they are likely to operate closer to home but they will still seek to fill each mission in some way. He goes further to suggest that the naval missions provide states with an '*interlocking continuum of nautical guidance in dealing with their maritime interests*'. No mission exists in isolation, the pursuit of one affects the ability to attain goals of another. The different missions are linked by a common hub, that of naval hardware, which provides the ability to fulfil the missions (see figure 2). He suggests that if any part of the rim (missions) is missing, or if any spokes (linking missions to equipment) are absent then '*a state's maritime output is in for a rough ride.*' To Kearsley the

¹⁷. Kearsley, pp.196-203

missions represent underlying needs that remain fixed and thus provide a guiding framework for the use of all navies.¹⁸

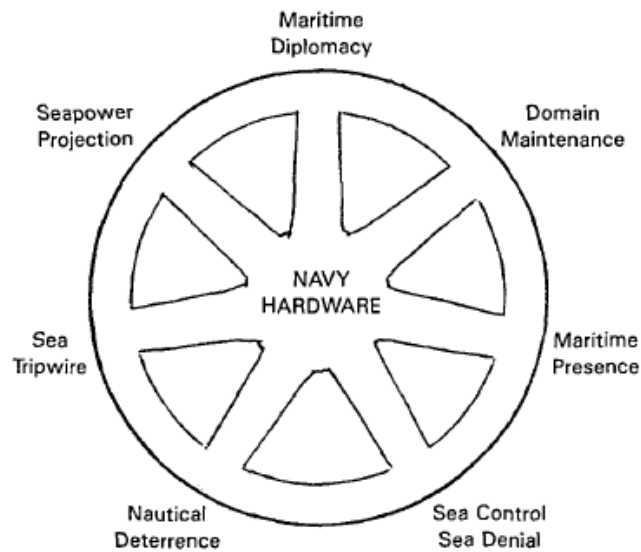


Figure 2. *Maritime output wheel*. Harold Kearsley, (1992)

Kearsley’s contention that maritime missions remain constant and apply equally to all states reflects a common assumption that the core principles of maritime strategy apply to all navies regardless of size. Till’s argument that the conceptual differences between large and small navies are ‘*more a matter of degree than of kind*’ and that ‘*[t]here is, in fact, little that is special or distinctive about a smaller navy*’ is typical of this approach and is based on the idea that strategic circumstances define the characteristics of a navy more than the fact that it is large or small. Thus he suggests that small navies face the same problems as large ones, but often seek different solutions.¹⁹

One might question the degree to which both the inputs and outputs of maritime power are the same for smaller navies or, at least whether they affect small navies in markedly different ways. For example, all navies face resource constraints but small navies, denied economies of scale, may need to deal with these in particular ways. This may imply compromises on capability in order to maintain hull numbers, the adoption of modularised designs to allow for flexibility at a reasonable cost, such as the Danish Navy’s Flyvefisken (Flying Fish)-class vessels, or collaborative projects such as the Tripartite-class mine hunters built by France, Belgium and the Netherlands in the 1980s. Role specialisation may be one means of retaining high-end capabilities in one field but comes at the cost of a loss in capability elsewhere. Matters may be complicated by the competing desire to buy the best equipment at the lowest price and a political requirement to be seen to support domestic construction and thus jobs. Second-hand equipment provided by friends and allies may offer a short-cut towards capability, but such equipment is often sub-optimal for local needs or conditions and may come at the cost of dependency. Compromise is an inevitable consequence for those with shallow pockets. On the other hand, the particular needs

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 203-207.

¹⁹ Till ‘Preface’ in Hobson & Kristiansen, *Navies in Northern Waters*.

of a smaller navy may not match those of a larger ally and this may spur investment and initiative such as the Norwegian Navy's sponsorship of the Penguin anti-ship missile or the Israeli development of the Gabriel missile.²⁰ In recessionary times cuts can have a disproportionate impact on a small navy, such as the Irish Naval Service, where the loss of a single ship would reduce the fleet by twelve per cent, threatening the ability of the Service to fulfil its most basic duties.

Small navies also face particular personnel challenges. It may be difficult to maintain an appropriate training structure at a reasonable cost, implying dependence on an ally or some perhaps some form of partnership with the merchant marine. The Irish Naval Service provides an excellent example of the latter, maintaining state of the art training and educational facilities adjacent to the Naval Base at Cork through a public private partnership with Cork Institute of Technology and Focus Education.²¹ Even with such initiatives it may be difficult to ensure appropriate systems of promotion within a small navy in which opportunities for advancement are more limited and it may also be difficult to ensure an appropriate balance of ship to shore duties, with serious implications for both recruitment and retention. As Jacob Borresen has noted, it can be difficult to gain appropriate command experience in a navy with few ships and even the provision of sufficient sea-time may be difficult in a navy built around missile boats and fast attack craft, vessels that, by design, necessarily spend less time at sea than do larger ships.²² This may increase the importance of multi-national collaborations and missions if these provide the opportunity for exercises on a scale and command roles of a type that cannot be provided at a national level. Limited size may, in some cases, be a spur to close and fruitful joint cooperation, or it could see the navy subsumed within a larger defence organisation that is generally unsympathetic to its needs.

It may indeed be the case that small navies share the same roles and concerns of larger navies but they face different challenges in meeting them. Alternately one might argue that the problems that they face and the solutions that they seek are unique and cannot usefully be examined using the same model as applied to larger navies. Further research is required to identify which is the case. Unfortunately, small navies have received relatively little attention from naval historians and maritime strategists, and this is particularly true of those writing in the English language. The scholar of naval history is blessed with an abundance of published material focusing on the two major navies of the past three hundred years, the British and US Navies and, by-extension, there is a lesser but still significant body of work that studies their main rivals. Much less is written on the rest, that is to say, on the majority of world navies. There are, of course, notable exceptions, including recent work by Lawrence Sondhaus²³ and also Jeremy Black, whose short examination of naval power since 1500 includes a deliberate focus on navies and activities that are often glossed over.²⁴ It is nevertheless true to say that the student seeking to research the activities of the US

²⁰ For an example see Christopher Chant, *Small Craft Navies*, (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1992) also see the discussion in David Wilson (ed.), *Maritime War in the Twenty-First Century*, (Canberra: RAN Seapower Centre, 2001).

²¹ For details see the National Maritime College of Ireland website, <http://www.nmci.ie/>

²² Borresen, *Coastal Power* pp.249-275.

²³ See Lawrence Sondhaus, *Navies in Modern World History*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2004)

²⁴ Jeremy Black, *Naval Power. A History of Warfare at Sea from 1500*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Navy in the twentieth century is well served by a large and vibrant body of published works while one interested in, say, the Royal Netherlands Navy or the Malaysian Navy will struggle to find appropriate material. As a scholar working in Ireland I should note that, until very recently, the Irish Naval Service had managed to escape any form of serious historical enquiry and anyone seeking a good book on this topic will have to write it for themselves.²⁵ It is difficult to draw convincing conclusions about the roles and activities of small navies when so little is written about them.

In recent years there has been much written about the Chinese Navy and on the maritime balance in East Asia but this simply repeats the pattern where interest, focuses on the major navies, their main rivals and smaller navies who are deemed interesting because of their relationship to their larger neighbours.²⁶ Indeed, small navies are most frequently thought of in terms of their potential as allies or enemies of larger navies.²⁷ This is, of course, perfectly natural and does reflect one aspect of their existence. However, it is important to remember that this may not actually be the role that defines them. While it may be the case that the Iranian Navy sees itself primarily as a sea denial force in the context of a potential war against the US and its allies, one should not assume that this is the case. For most navies it will not be true and local circumstances will be dominant. Given this it may be dangerous to assume that concepts and principles used to understand the activities of large navies are necessarily relevant to all others and one must avoid the temptation to understand small navies only through their engagement with large ones.

Traditional approaches to maritime strategy

Theories and concepts relating to maritime strategy have, for more than a century, been dominated by an Anglo-American tradition rooted in the work of the American Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914), his British counterpart, Julian Corbett (1854-1922) and their numerous fellow travellers. Mahan, in particular, helped to popularise an approach to maritime strategy that emphasised the importance of a dominant battle fleet able to gain command of the sea through the defeat of its opponents in decisive battle. Once secured such command would enable the superior fleet to blockade their enemy, neutralising their remaining naval assets and strangling their trade whilst simultaneously protecting friendly shipping and enabling expeditionary operations and other activities from the sea. Mahan was critical of alternative approaches that did not focus on command of the sea in the same way and that diverted assets away from the overriding requirement to gain or challenge such command. The French, in particular, come in for considerable criticism for their tendency to neglect the need to

²⁵ There are a handful of works that relate to the Irish Naval Service, including Aidan McIvor, *A History of the Irish Naval Service*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006) and Tom McGinty, *The Irish Navy: a story of courage and tenacity*, (Tralee, 1995) but neither is particularly scholarly. The most detailed examination to date has been provided by the PhD thesis of Padraic O'Confaola, *The Naval Forces of the Irish State, 1922-1977* (National University of Ireland Maynooth, 2010) .

²⁶ For example see Toshi Yoshihara & James Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific: China's rise and the Challenge to US Maritime Strategy*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010); Bernard Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: Second Edition. China's Navy in the Twenty-First Century*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010); Ronal O'Rourke, *China's Naval Modernization. Implications for US Naval Capabilities*, (Congressional Research Service, 2012).

²⁷ A good example of this is provided by Charles Koburger, *Naval Warfare, Small Navies and Fat Merchantmen. Naval Strategies for the 1990s*, (New York: Praeger, 1990).

focus on the defeat of the enemy fleet and for favouring commerce raiding, a form of economic warfare that Mahan considered markedly inferior to blockade.²⁸

Corbett's approach offered more nuance than did Mahan's and his historical method was more professional. He recognised the value of gaining command of the sea, but also the difficulty of achieving this and tended to portray such command as an enabler for other things and something that was liable to be limited in its scope and duration. He also placed a greater emphasis than did Mahan on what we would today call 'joint operations'.²⁹ What Corbett shared in common with his American counter-part was a belief in the strategic utility of superior sea power derived from an historical examination based largely on the British experience. That is, their ideas were formed from an analysis of the history of the pre-eminent navy from which they derived 'principles' that were designed to have relevance beyond the historical case studies from which they originated. They wrote so that they could influence policy. The degree to which they were successful is open to debate. The widespread popularity of Mahan's work, and the frequency with which it was, and still is, quoted by naval officers and other commentators could seduce one into believing that his influence was all encompassing, particularly in his homeland. Famously, in the 1940s the former US Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, was moved to complain that 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*'.³⁰

On the other hand, one could argue that Mahan helped to popularise ideas about strategy that already had considerable currency and that without Mahan the major navies would have adopted more or less the same policies anyway. In the case of Corbett, he had rather little success in persuading the pre-1914 Royal Navy to focus more attention on joint operations from the sea and the post-war Admiralty was sufficiently unimpressed with his tendency to downplay the primary importance of seeking out battle that they inserted a disclaimer to this effect into the official history of the navy in the First World War, the first three volumes of which were written by Corbett. He may have had more success in influencing wartime British policy towards trade defence, which was rather unfortunate as his ideas in this respect were badly flawed.

Thus, one can debate the extent to which the ideas of Mahan and Corbett changed actual naval policy during and after their lifetimes. The least that one can say, however, is that they helped to set the terms within which the debates about naval strategy and policy were conducted. The concepts and principles articulated and popularised by Mahan and Corbett inspired many others who wrote in a similar vein and they underpin modern approaches to maritime policy and strategy. These ideas

²⁸ See A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1890) and A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1892). For an excellent introduction to Mahan's work see Jon Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command. The Classic Worlds of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered*, (Baltimore: John's Hopkins Press, 1997).

²⁹ In particular see Julian Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, first publ. 1911, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988). Also see Geoffrey Till (ed.), *The Development of British Naval Thinking*, (London: Routledge, 2006).

³⁰ Phillip Crowl, 'Alfred Thayer Mahan: the naval historian' in Peter Paret, (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1996) p.444.

lie at the heart of much contemporary western naval doctrine and both Mahan and Corbett are quoted in recent doctrine publications.³¹ In many respects Corbett has rather leapfrogged Mahan in terms of apparent relevance as his focus on joint operations from the sea suits the emphasis on expeditionary operations that has characterised much western naval policy since the end of the Cold War. Of course, their influence extends beyond naval academies and admiralty buildings and it has had an important impact on academic enquiry into naval history and strategy.

Richard Harding has argued that the enduring popularity of this Anglo-American tradition has skewed historical analysis by setting the parameters within which war at sea has tended to be studied. This results in a particular focus on the success of the British approach in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, built around the importance of the battle fleet and the fight for command of the sea, and to the neglect of alternatives such as commerce raiding. Harding stresses that, while naval strategy in the age of sail may indeed have become dominated by battle fleet operations and the dominance of the British battle fleet may have laid the basis for their success in the war at sea against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, this does not mean that this was the only possible route to success for other nations nor that the success of the British model was as obvious in foresight as it has appeared in hindsight to many historians.³² In truth, for all except the largest navies, the most relevant histories relate less to the dominant Royal Navy and more to its victims. As has already been noted, this is an area of enquiry that is not particularly well served in English language publications. Mahan offers advice on what one should do to become the dominant navy, but has less to teach those for whom this will never be possible. The dominant tradition in anglophone maritime strategy and history, built upon a model derived initially from British success in the wars against France, and more recently from Anglo-American success in two world wars, may actually suggest solutions that are of little utility for most navies and that seduce historians and other commentators away from the true complexities of war at sea.

The main counter to this Anglo-American tradition came from the French *Jeune Ecole* (Young School). Building on a foundation laid by Baron Richard Grivel in the 1860s a number of individuals, and most notably Admiral Theophile Aube and Gabriel Charmes, argued against trying to match the British in the battle for command of the sea and advocated a more asymmetric approach. Instead of seeking to gain command of the sea against an opponent with a larger fleet, superior industry and more helpful geography, they believed that British dependence on the sea could be turned against them by conducting a ruthless war on merchant shipping. Such a campaign would disrupt trade and food supplies, undermine British finance, force insurance rates to rise to unsustainable levels and cause social and political unrest thereby forcing the government to come to terms. The aim was not to starve Britain into submission, but rather to create an economic panic that would bring about a social and political collapse. In this respect they drew comfort from experience of the US Civil War, where a handful of Confederate raiders had preyed on Union shipping, driving merchant ships away from the American flag, a blow from which the US merchant fleet never quite recovered. They also noted how the Union blockade of Southern

³¹ For example see US Navy, *Naval Doctrine Publication 1: Naval Warfare* (1994); RAN *Doctrine 1, Australian Maritime Doctrine* (2000); *Indian Maritime Doctrine* (2004); and, *BR1806. British Maritime Doctrine*, 3rd edition, (2004)

³² Richard Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare, 1650-1830*, (London: Routledge, 1999) pp.281-287.

cotton exports had caused significant distress in northern English manufacturing towns dependent on cotton mills for employment.³³

The approach of the *Jeune Ecole* was enabled by new technology, namely the development of steam propulsion and the self-propelled torpedo which allowed for the development of small, fast vessels (torpedo boats) equipped with a weapon able to sink the largest opponent. These ships, far cheaper than battleships, could be built in large numbers and would be able to drive blockading British ships from French ports. This, in conjunction with a limited number of coastal defence ships, would protect the French coast from sea borne attack and would enable steam driven commerce raiders to break into Britain's vital sea lanes, sinking vessels on sight or attacking merchant ships in harbour. That such an approach ran foul of the 1856 Declaration of Paris, which outlawed such attacks on merchant ships, was of no concern to Aube, who believed international law to be irreconcilable with war.³⁴

The *Jeune Ecole* gained much currency in France, especially when Aube was appointed Minister of Marine in 1886, and in many other navies in the 1880s, particularly those of Germany and Austria-Hungary. By the end of the century, however, the approach had fallen out of favour. Part of the reason for this was technological. While torpedo boats may have possessed a potent ship-killing weapon they could be countered with the development of a new class of ship, the torpedo-boat destroyer. The development of smokeless powder, searchlights, torpedo nets, rapid firing secondary armament and improved speed all made large warships rather less vulnerable while the development of long-range guns firing armour piercing shells implied that battle would continue to be decided by heavily armoured battleships able to slug it out with ships of equivalent size and capability. The *Jeune Ecole* had also been rather optimistic about the performance of small torpedo boats beyond coastal waters. Just as pertinently for the French, the strategy was only really relevant in a war against Britain as no other potential rival was as dependent on sea borne trade. Despite a range of colonial disputes and the legacy of centuries of bitter rivalry Britain was not France's only or even its most likely enemy.

That the *Jeune Ecole* may ultimately have failed to change French naval policy in the long term does not necessarily invalidate their relevance to lesser naval powers seeking to gain strategic leverage without achieving sea control. The basic logic of denying the use of the sea to a more powerful adversary who was dependent on such use lay at the heart of the German U-boat campaigns in two world wars where the submarine provided an offensive capability that could not be realised by the torpedo boats of the previous century. The contrast between the near success of the submarine campaign in the First World War and the strategic irrelevance of the battleships of the Imperial German Navy is instructive. One can only speculate on the outcome of the war had Germany devoted less time and treasure to the construction of the world's second largest dreadnought battle fleet and more on its submarine arm but it is fair to

³³ Arne Roksund, *The Jeune Ecole. The Strategy of the Weak*, (BRILL, 2007); Arne Roksund, 'The *Jeune Ecole*: the Strategy of the Weak' in Hobson & Kristiansen, *Navies and Northern Waters*, pp.117-150; and, Lawrence Sondhaus, *Naval Warfare 1815-1914*, (London: Routledge, 2001) chapter 6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

say that a Mahanian focus on decisive battle was of little use to Germany in either war.³⁵

However, one might question the extent to which the approach advocated by the Jeune Ecole is relevant to many small navies today. All of the major world economies are dependent on a global trading system that is itself dependent on the ability to move goods by sea. This does not so much provide an opportunity for small navies as it acts as a constraint. In a globalised world an attack on the merchant shipping of one state would likely have ramifications that would impact on all. It is difficult to believe that any of the major powers would view with satisfaction the predations of a modern day raider in the mould of the *Graf Spee*, *Mowe* or *Alabama*. This does not mean that economic warfare will not feature in any future war or that *guerre de course* will not re-emerge as a tool employed by navies. However, states that care about international law and opinion, and small powers have little option but to care, are unlikely to find such a strategy appealing. The costs would likely far outweigh the benefit in most circumstances.

Writing forty years after the Jeune Ecole's heyday, another French naval officer, Raoul Castex, developed a theory of strategic manoeuvre designed to allow smaller navies to take on larger opponents by exploiting their ability to use intelligent manoeuvre to create a local superiority of numbers.³⁶ This was not dissimilar to what the German High Seas Fleet had been trying to do prior to the Battle of Jutland in 1916 after which, having faced the prospect of annihilation at the hands of the concentrated might of the British Grand Fleet, they were much more circumspect. Castex's work is of value for navies liable to find themselves at war with a larger counterpart and deserves to be more widely read, particularly since the original five volumes have been translated into English and, mercifully, abridged. Nevertheless, for Castex, like Mahan, the ultimate goal remained 'mastery' of the sea, to be achieved in battle where the requirement for superior numbers remained paramount. As such, his relevance to many small navies will be limited to circumstances where the disparity of strength is not too great. Nevertheless, Castex's conclusions offer greater comfort to small navies than those of his contemporary, Herbert Rosinski, who wrote of the '*strategic helplessness of a decisively inferior fleet*'.³⁷

Commerce raiding, sea denial and coastal defence

Traditional interpretations suggest that small navies tend to focus less on blue-water sea control operations and instead concentrate, in war, on a mixture of sea denial, commerce raiding and/or coastal defence. They do so in order to deter or disrupt the activities of larger enemies without attempting to achieve sea control beyond coastal waters. While this does reflect a certain pattern of behaviour associated with many small navies it runs the risk of interpreting the activities of such navies only through

³⁵ For an examination of contemporary German debates on these issues see Herbert Rosinski, 'New Thoughts on Strategy' in B. Simpson, (ed.), *War, Strategy and Maritime Powers*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1977) and Wolfgang Wegener, *The Naval Strategy of the World War*, first public. 1929, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1989)

³⁶ Raoul Castex, *Strategic Theories*, ed. and trans. By Eugenia Kiesling (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994)

³⁷ See Ian Speller, 'Naval Warfare' in David Jordan, James Kiras, David Lonsdale, Ian Speller, Christopher Tuck and C. Dale Walton, *Understanding Modern Warfare*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009) p.141.

their engagement with larger rivals. This may be appropriate in some circumstances but does little to reflect the potential diversity of roles.

Many small navies operate in an environment where a larger enemy does not exist or where potential enemies can be left for others to deal with. For most of its existence the Irish Naval Service has operated in such an environment, courtesy of their neighbours, leaving it free to focus on tasks other than either sea control or sea denial.³⁸ A small navy whose enemy is of similar size and capability may seek to exploit sea control in order to impose a blockade, conduct strikes from the sea or support expeditionary operations in a manner more commonly associated with larger navies. The Pacific War of 1879-1883 provides a good illustration of this. The general point is that the roles that smaller navies fulfil are not pre-ordained but rather reflect local needs and ambitions.

Smaller navies who do fear attack by a stronger enemy are still likely to focus on sea denial as a more realistic option than sea control. Classic means of achieving sea denial include mines, submarines, fast attack craft and flotilla vessels and land based aircraft. In the 1970s Admiral Stansfield Turner described sea denial as '*guerrilla warfare at sea*' where, through the use of hit and run attacks, and the exploitation of surprise and manoeuvre, an inferior force can threaten a larger foe.³⁹ For some navies sea denial may be the primary role, with little or no intent that this will translate into sea control. For others sea denial might be viewed as a stepping stone to sea control and it is quite possible for a navy to pursue a sea denial strategy in one area whilst simultaneously seeking to gain sea control elsewhere.

Sea denial capabilities can rest on assets that are relatively cheap (such as mines) or that are rather expensive (such as multi-role frigates) but, as a general rule of thumb, the attempt to deny use of the sea does not require the same range and scale of assets as does sea control and thus, as an option, this may appeal to those navies with limited budgets and an apparent need. Indeed, in recent decades the introduction of new technology, such as anti-ship missiles, the development of affordable and potent diesel-electric submarines and the continued threat posed by mines appears to offer small navies the type of potency against larger foes that the *Jeune Ecole* anticipated, but could not deliver. Indeed, the danger of anti-access sea denial weaponry has had an important impact on the thinking of larger navies, and most obviously the US Navy, whose concepts for over the horizon operations are designed to reduce this threat.⁴⁰

Coastal defence implies sea denial within coastal waters and is primarily aimed at protecting the coast from sea borne attack. It tends to involve both sea based capabilities and land based systems, such as aircraft and coastal missile and/or artillery batteries. In the nineteenth century US naval policy for any war with Britain tended to focus on coastal defence, with the construction of coastal fortifications and ships designed for inshore defence, in addition to commerce raiding on the high seas.

³⁸ See O'Conghaola, 'The Naval Forces of the Irish State' *passim*.

³⁹ See Geoffrey Till, *Seapower. A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, (London: Frank Cass, 2004) pp.157-9

⁴⁰ For an examination of US concerns see 'Focus on China', *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, April 2011; Ronal O'Rourke, *China's Naval Modernization. Implications for US Naval Capabilities*, (Congressional Research Service, 2012).

In the late 1920 and 1930s the Soviet New School developed an approach to coastal defence based on an integrated system of local defence based on mines, coastal artillery, submarines and motor torpedo boats. It is interesting to note that they abandoned this approach in the late 1930s and returned to a more traditional vision built around a more balanced fleet.⁴¹ As ambitions changed, so did strategy.

The history of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (Navy) (PLA(N)) from 1949 until the 1980s appears to provide an almost textbook example of a small navy tailored to protect local waters in cooperation with land and air forces, with an emphasis on coastal defence and sea denial capabilities. That history does offer occasional examples of more ambitious activity and an illustration of what a small navy can achieve, particularly when it is one arm of a major regional power. The seizure of the Paracel islands from South Vietnamese control in 1974, conflict with Vietnam over the Spratley Islands in 1988 and the bloodless seizure of Mischief Reef from the Philippines in 1995 provides clear evidence of what a small navy can achieve against a weaker rival.⁴²

That Chinese naval ambitions and capabilities have grown since the 1980s reflects the growth in Chinese national power. It could also lend credence to the erroneous assumption that the small coastal defence navy represents an inferior state of being that naturally evolves into a more mature version of maritime power, focused on sea control and blue water operations, once resources allow. One might argue that this is indeed the route that the PLA(N) is taking, following a path trodden previously by the Soviet, Imperial German and US Navies, all of whom graduated from coastal defence and/or commerce raiding to a more Mahanian role. It is, of course, a route that most navies never follow.

Small navies today

The growth of Chinese power is one of the more frequently discussed issues in international relations today and there is no shortage of commentary focusing on Chinese naval policy and its impact on the region and beyond. It does provide an interesting case study of the way in which the increasing naval power of one state necessarily has an impact on others. US paranoia about the development by China of new anti-access weapons, such as 'carrier-killing' missiles, represents just one aspect of this.⁴³ Smaller regional navies will also have to adjust their policies to accommodate new realities at sea.⁴⁴ There is nothing new in this. Small navies living in the shadow of larger rivals have always had to seek some way of dealing with

⁴¹ R.W. Herrick, *Soviet Naval Theory and Policy*, (Washington: US Govt Printing Office, 1988) passim. Also see Brian Ranft and Geoffrey Till, *The Sea in Soviet Strategy*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval institute Press, 1984)

⁴² For an interpretation that examines the growth of Chinese naval power within a framework that is redolent of Mahan and Corbett see Thomas Kane, *Chinese Grand Strategy and Maritime Power*, (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴³ See 'China's Carrier Killers' in *Newsweek*, 4 October 2011; Lt Cdr Mathew Harper, 'Chinese Missiles and the Walmart Factor', in *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, July 2011; Andrew S. Erickson and David D. Yang, "Using the Land to Control the Sea? Chinese Analysts Consider the Antiship Ballistic Missile," *Naval War College Review*, vol. 62, no. 4 (Autumn 2009),

⁴⁴ For an example of the impact on Australian policy see Leszek Buszynski, 'Emerging Naval Rivalry in East Asia and the Indian Ocean: Implications for Australia' in *Security Challenges*, Vol.5, No. 3 (2009)

them. The experience of the Royal Norwegian Navy offers another interesting example of this.

Norway has a large merchant navy and, from the 1970s, significant offshore oil and gas resources whose protection poses a complex challenge that few small navies share. The Norwegian approach as an alliance member during the Cold War balanced the need to contribute to collective and national self defence with a belief in the need to reassure the Soviet Union and to avoid provocation that harked back to earlier days of neutrality. In common with many small powers both past and present Norway has therefore tended to emphasise the importance of international law as one route towards security. The primary threat to Norway, posed by the Soviet Union, led eventually to an emphasis on a complex layered defence that integrated joint assets including land based aircraft, coastal artillery and missiles, fast attack craft and submarines that could act together synergistically, exploiting local geography and a superior knowledge of local conditions, to deter and, if necessary, disrupt any Soviet attack. Ultimately, of course, a successful defence depended on the arrival of alliance support but it was clear that Norway needed an ability to protect itself prior to the arrival of any help and also, critically, it needed an ability to protect national self interest in limited scenarios that might not trigger an alliance response. This called for balanced capabilities that provided a focus on coastal defence and sea denial but also offered an ability to operate further offshore in defence of fish stocks, oil and gas reserves and national sovereignty. Given this it is notable that, while the Norwegian armed forces were reduced at the end of the Cold War, the Coastguard grew in both size and importance. The end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet fleet made the coastal defence role less urgent and brought a new emphasis using maritime resources to contribute to UN peace support operations overseas, a development mirrored by other Scandinavian navies.⁴⁵

The outcome of controversies over the nature of Norwegian defence policy, and of the balance to be placed on land or sea-based systems, reflect the different inputs into the policy process. In some respects these suggest features unique to the Norwegian experience, particularly the debate over the emphasis to place on fixed coastal artillery sites, while in other respects debates, such as that occurred in the 1960s between ‘traditionalists’ who favoured an ocean-going capability built around large destroyers and ‘modernisers’ who preferred a greater number of smaller assets, were common in many navies.

Building on the Norwegian experience Borresen sought to establish a theory of the sea power of the ‘coastal state’, defined as ‘*a small or medium sized state that is situated by the sea and whose national interest to a considerable extent is connected to the sea*’.⁴⁶ Despite avoiding the phrase his focus was on smaller navies. His aim was to develop a theory that would apply to all coastal states by suggesting how they might ‘*think about seapower*’ despite a wide variance in roles, tasks and capabilities. He shared with Till a belief that such variance meant that there could be no model for a small/coastal navy beyond the understanding that in order to be worthwhile they must be relevant to the political leaders of the state to which they beyond. Relevance depends on the ability to do something useful within the context of state policy.

⁴⁵ Rolf Tamnes, ‘Major Coastal State – Small Naval Power: Norway’s Cold War Policy and Strategy’, in Hobson & Kristiansen, *Navies and Northern Waters*, pp222-248.

⁴⁶ Borresen, ‘Coastal Power’, p.250.

Borresen provides an interesting examination of what that ‘*something useful*’ might be. He also offers an insight into some of the constraints facing smaller navies. Perhaps inevitably his conclusions reflected his position as a Commodore in the Norwegian Navy and one could argue that what he offers is really an examination of the sea power of the Norwegian state, but his analysis is useful nonetheless.

According to Borresen the primary task of the coastal state is not to seek sea control on the high seas but to protect resources within the 200nm Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and to prevent violations of home waters. He notes that the territorialisation of the sea resulting from UNCLOS III represents an erosion of the principle of the freedom of the seas that benefits the coastal state while also setting new challenges in terms of the protection of sovereignty and the offshore estate. This requires some form of naval power, notwithstanding limits in terms of range, scope and scale. He argues that the failure to enforce jurisdiction within these waters can create a vacuum that will draw in other actors. Adherence to international law is identified as an important bulwark against the ambitions of larger navies. Indeed, he explains that through adherence to international law and ‘*legitimate, efficient, predictable and even handed enforcement of sovereignty in territorial waters and of jurisdiction in the EEZ*’ one can remove the incentive for other states to intervene military while, conversely, the inability to offer this can invite unwanted attention.⁴⁷

Borresen recognises that in times of war the coastal state is unlikely to be able to protect its full EEZ and will instead have to focus on inshore waters and the protection of its coastline. Given the likely outcome of any war with a major power the main interest of the coastal state is in avoiding war. The coastal navy can help to deter war by providing a credible deterrent through an ability to inflict significant military, diplomatic or economic cost on an aggressor. This tends to require a defensive structure that can exploit local conditions to maximise the cost of any attack and also forces able provide a threshold that the attacker must cross or back down. In this context a balanced force is valuable as it provides the ability to deal with a wide range of incursions and, if there are sufficient resources to challenge an intrusion wherever it occurs, can force an opponent into an overt act of aggression. While quality is liable to count for much in any fight in coastal waters quantity does have its merits. When acting as a threshold (‘*tripwire*’ in Kearsley’s model) the ability to be present at an engagement may matter more than the ability to survive it. Borresen’s conclusions appear to confirm Kearsley’s idea that small navies will generally seek to fulfil the same roles as larger one, noting the importance of not allowing a potential opponent the ability to oppose national interests at sea unchallenged. As he notes, in an appeal to international opinion ‘*a magnificent and spectacular rout may come in just as handy as an unexpected victory*’.⁴⁸

In contrast, the Irish Naval Service has not traditionally focused on sea denial tasks but has instead emphasised constabulary duties including fishery protection and operations designed to counteract arms and drugs smuggling whilst also maintaining a presence in Ireland’s territorial seas and undertaking occasional forays further afield on diplomatic duties and also in support of the Irish forces deployed overseas on UN missions. As one would expect the ships of the Service are optimised for their likely

⁴⁷ Borresen, ‘Coastal Power’. Also see, Jacob Borresen, ‘The Seapower of the Coastal State’ in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.17, Issue 1, 1994.

⁴⁸ Borresen, ‘Coastal Power’, p.254

roles and possess a modest combat capability that does not include anti-ship missiles, air defence missiles, torpedoes, mines or any anti-submarine capability. This is largely a reflection of the benign environment in which they operate and in the expectation that in a more complex environment they would operate as part of a larger coalition in which coalition partners could be expected to fulfil war-fighting tasks.

The current Irish fleet reflects many of the challenges that small navies face in maintaining capabilities. The Naval Service currently operates eight ships, at least six of which are approaching the end of their useful lives. The largest, LE *Eithne* is designated a Helicopter Patrol Vessel although, tellingly, it no longer has an aviation role and the Naval Service does not possess any helicopters. *Eithne* was built at the Verlome yard in Cork (Ireland), as were the Service's three Offshore Patrol Vessels (LE *Aoife*, *Aisling*, and *Emer*). Unfortunately the yard proved uneconomic despite significant government subsidies and it has now closed. Consequently the Service's two most recent ships, the Large Patrol Vessels LE *Roisin* and LE *Niamh*, were built at Appledore (UK) and are modified versions of the Mauritius Coastguard's Guardian-class ships. The construction of these vessels was 65 per cent paid for by the EU, a sign of the importance of Irish waters to the security and prosperity of the European Union.⁴⁹ The remaining two vessels, the coastal patrol vessels LE *Orla* and *Ciara* were formerly HMS *Swift* and *Swallow*, Hong Kong patrol ships. Purchased from the British in 1988 they have not proven to be entirely suited to North Atlantic waters, demonstrating the difficulty of relying on second hand equipment designed for another environment.

An examination of the Irish experience would suggest that some navies do not feel the need to fill the full range of roles and missions identified by Kearsley. However, at different times during its history (and pre-history⁵⁰) the Irish Naval Service has conducted operations or focused on missions that include maritime power projection (during the Civil War 1922-23), sea denial and coastal defence (1939-45) and seaward defence (1950s) in addition to their familiar coastguard roles of fishery protection, counter-smuggling, the maintenance of good order at sea etc.⁵¹ Since the late 1970s the Naval Service has undertaken operations in support of Irish forces deployed overseas on UN missions and from the 1980s has undertaken diplomatic visits across Europe, to the United States, South America and into Asian waters. Accession to the EEC and the adoption of a 200-nm Exclusive Economic Zone significantly increased the constabulary work-load, helping to maintain the relevance of a service traditionally overshadowed by an army dominated defence structure and a government bureaucracy rarely inclined to look seaward. Recent Irish claims to jurisdiction over their continental shelf further increase the sea area to be policed, simultaneously providing economic opportunity and an additional burden for the navy.⁵²

⁴⁹ Tim Fish, 'Irish Naval Service: small fish sets its sights on a bigger pool', in *Jane's Navy International*, 01 October 2007.

⁵⁰ The Irish Naval Service was formally founded in 1946 but its predecessors, the Marine and Coastwatching Service and before that, the Coastal and Marine Service were small navies in all but name.

⁵¹ See O'Conghaola, 'Naval Forces of the Irish state' passim.

⁵² Wesley Bourke, 'Developing Ireland's Seapower. A Naval Service Perspective from Flag Officer Commanding the Naval Service, Commodore Mark Mellett DSM', in *An Cosantoir*, Sept 2011, pp. 20-21.

It remains to be seen how well the Irish Naval Service will weather the financial storm that currently afflicts Ireland, and also the rest of the EU. The Service has developed plans to replace its now ageing fleet, focusing on their constabulary duties but also on the potential for ships to provide more active support to Irish forces overseas. The Service has also developed a partnership with civil industry and education in an attempt to encourage innovation and investment that will allow Ireland to ‘unlock’ its energy and maritime potential. Perhaps unusually for a navy, the Irish Naval Service thus promotes wealth creation and intellectual innovation in non- military spheres.⁵³ In a country with little public appreciation of its maritime heritage and little understanding of the potential uses of the sea the process may help the Naval Service to prove its relevance and to make a positive contribution to the recovery of the Irish economy. Whatever the case, it would appear to demonstrate that it is difficult to generalise about the inputs and outputs of naval policy.

In Conclusion

It is clearly difficult to define precisely what one means by the term ‘small navy’. Definitions based on the size of the navy, or of the state to which it belongs, are problematic. ‘Smallness’ does relate to relative size but must also take into account a range of other factors, including role, reputation and self-image. Till’s suggestion that small navies are those with ‘*limited means and aspirations*’ is useful given that precise definitions based on quantitative factors may be misleading. All navies, small or large, must be understood within their own particular context and with an understanding of their intended roles. Rather than seeking a precise definition of what is and is not a ‘small navy’ it may be more appropriate to establish the extent to which such navies have purposes, functions and characteristics that distinguish them from larger navies and to ask the associated question of whether concepts and strategies devised for larger navies have the same relevance for those with different roles and characteristics. The dominance of the Anglo-American tradition in maritime thought, and the tendency of naval historians and maritime commentators to approach the subject on the terms implied by this tradition, may undermine our understanding of navies for whom a different approach may be more appropriate. Thus, it is important to question whether or not small navies are sufficiently different from larger navies to warrant investigation as a distinct group or whether the differences between the large and the small are more a matter of degree than of kind, as has often been argued. Equally one should ask whether there are sufficient commonalities between different small navies to allow for the identification of the kind of shared characteristics that would make employment of the term useful. To use Kearsley’s terminology, to what extent do the inputs and outputs of naval policy differentiate small navies from large navies and to what extent do they differentiate or connect small navies from or to each other?

The aim of this paper was to identify rather than to answer the questions noted above and to act as a ‘call to arms’ for others to take up the challenge, to help answer these questions and to identify others. This paper represents an early step in a ‘small navies’ project being developed by the Centre of Military History and Strategic Studies at the

⁵³ Ibid. For additional information see the Irish Maritime and Energy Research Cluster (IMERC), a partnership between University College Cork, Cork Institute of Technology and the Irish Naval Service. *IMERC Strategy 2011-2011* .(October, 2011). <http://www.imerc.ie/>

National University of Ireland Maynooth in partnership with the Irish Naval Service, Liverpool Hope University and the Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies at King's College London. Hopefully that project will provide some answers and, in doing so, will shed important light onto a neglected aspect of maritime strategy and policy.