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MARITIME CHOKEPOINTS: KEY SEA LINES OF COMMUNICATION (SLOCs) AND STRATEGY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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Does U.S. military strategy adequately address maritime chokepoints or is there an oversight awaiting an untimely catastrophic event? The importance of sea lines of communication (SLOCs), especially chokepoints, have been constant throughout history. When geopolitical issues associated with SLOCs have been misunderstood or overlooked, the consequences have been severe. The United States needs to ensure that current strategy and resources properly address modern and future SLOC issues. This paper examines SLOC issues and whether or not the United States is properly addressing such issues accordingly.

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"Man's natural habitat is land, and land dominates his conscious endeavor -- social, economic, political, and military. Yet, almost three quarters of his world is ocean. It is the original source of life for all earth's species; it is the essential of means of global transport for man's produce, commerce, and military strength.....While the world ocean is beyond sight of much of mankind, its influence is ubiquitous."[1]

Sir Walter Raleigh once observed, in 1616, that , "Whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself."[2] Unimpeded sea lines of communication (SLOCs) are as important today to the economic growth and security of a nation whose critical resources, friends, and enemies lie beyond the World Ocean (ocean and sea are used interchangeably throughout this report to designate major water bodies).[3] The World Ocean are those contiguous oceans and seas which define the major continents and convey the commerce of the trading nation.[4] The importance of the SLOCs have remained constant. Over 90 percent of global trade occurs by sea, and the United States depends on the seas for its defense. As the world moves into a new world order, albeit undefined and uncertain, does U.S. strategy and resources adequately address SLOCs, or chokepoints, or are there oversights warranting redress? This paper will examine the historical aspects of the SLOC issue based on Alfred Thayer Mahan's writings which underscore the importance of SLOCs; assess current issues and foreign policy concerns; assess U.S. strategy as it relates to SLOCs; and provide a final perspective on the SLOC issue.

Alfred Thayer Mahan: A Historic Perspective:

The historical importance of mercantile trade and seapower are exemplified by emergence of global nations like Great Britain and the United States. Conversely, failure to understand the important association between mercantilism and seapower have resulted in the fall of great nations, like Napoleon's France.

Referenced as "Clauswitz of the Sea", Alfred Thayer Mahan's views on naval strategy influenced seapower development of 20th century Great Britain, Germany, Japan, and the United States.[5] Mahan's writings about the importance of successfully projecting worldwide offensive seapower played a direct role in the victory of the United States in World War II and its current status as the world's sole superpower.[6]

Mahan was born on 27 September 1840, at West Point, New York. His father, Dennis Hart Mahan, taught at the U.S. Military Academy and propagated the theories of Antoine Henri Jomini. Alfred Thayer Mahan, however, chose the sea service and attended the U.S. Naval Academy. He graduated second in the class of 1859.[7] He saw combat during the Civil War, serving at Port Royal Sound, South Carolina and later on blockade duty with the South Atlantic and West Gulf Squadrons. He initially served at the Naval War College as a lecturer on naval history and strategy, beginning 1885. He felt strongly that the Naval War College should be a senior officer intellectual center for study of historical and theoretical aspects of naval warfare vice an extension of hands-on navy training facilities. Mahan was successful in this effort. He served as president of the Naval War College during 1892 - 1893 and retired from the navy in 1896. He was recalled on active duty in 1898, during the Spanish American War, to sit on the Naval War Board, and in

1899, he served as delegate to the peace conference at the Hague. In 1906 he retired as a rear admiral; thereafter, he continued to write books on naval strategy and biographies of great leaders like Horatio Nelson and David Glasgow Farragut. Mahan was seventy-four when he died, 1 December 1914, in Washington D.C. One of his admirers was President Theodore Roosevelt who frequently consulted Mahan on naval issues. His writings have been reprinted and published, notably in Great Britain, Germany, and Japan who in turn adopted many of his theories on strategy and advice in other naval matters like shipbuilding.

The essence of Mahan's theory was that a nation could be strong only if it had enough seapower to control the seas against any threat. Historical Great Britain impressed Mahan as an example of his postulation. One of the key associated issues of Mahan's theory is that of strategic lines of communication. Historical battles have been decided by severing enemy lines of communication -- Napoleon severing enemy supplies at Marengo (1800) and Ulm (1805); Farragut and Porter held the lines of communications of the forts on the Mississippi thus leading to their conquest during the Civil War. Japan was defeated primarily because the destruction of her merchant fleet (by submarines, mining) gradually shut off the oil and raw materials necessary to expand and sustain her industry and war machine.[8]

Therefore, as Mahan has conveyed, there are "...two classes of powers: those whose communication is by land, and those who depend upon the sea. The sea lines are the most numerous and easy, and they will probably be determinative of the course of trade."[9]

Mahan recognized the enormous value in lines of communication that would occur with the advent of the Panama Canal, then being discussed. The sea was a very important medium of commerce and the advent of the Canal adjoining two important SLOCs, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, was of incalculable value. Mahan writes,

"The very sound, commerce, brings with it a suggestion of the sea, for it is maritime commerce that has in all ages been most fruitful of wealth; and wealth is but the concrete expression of a nation's energy of life, material and mental. The power, therefore, to insure these communications to one's self, and to interrupt them for an adversary, affects the very root of a nation's vigor, as in military operations it does the existence of an army, or as the free access to rain and sun -- communications from without -- does the life of a plant."[10]

Mahan further postulates that there are key strategic questions a sea power nation must address prior to going to war. These questions are [11]

- What is the true objective?
- What are the points upon which it (the navy) should be concentrated?
- Where are the establishment of depots of coal and supplies?
- How are communications maintained between these depots and the home base?
- What is the military value of commerce-destroying as a decisive or secondary operation of war?
- What is the system upon which commerce-destroying can be most efficiently conducted -- whether by scattered cruisers or by holding in force some vital center through which commercial shipping must pass?

An assessment of strategic art would conclude that these questions when answered will identify the ends, ways, and means to exploit SLOCs for military strategic success.

U.S. history, prior to and after Mahan, has shown the importance of commerce-destroying. The United States Navy dealt a decisive blow to the Confederacy in the

destruction of commerce by blockading and closing ports of egress and ingress.[12] Today the United Nations has supported an embargo against Iraq until Suddam Hussein fully complies with the war ending treaty and recognizes the independence of Kuwait. This is being enforced in part by U.S. naval forces.

Mahan conveys that history has shown that travel and traffic by water have always been easier and cheaper than by land. Though there have been problems with piracy in the past, that is no longer a principal issue. But in examining the past threats to mercantilism , Mahan feels that naval forces are essential to enhance peaceful shipping.

During the days of European colonization, security of sea travel and sea trade was a problem and days of long-standing peace settlements between nations were scarce. As Mahan indicates,

"....thus arose the demand for stations along the road, like the Cape of Good Hope, St. Helena, and Mauritius, not primarily for trade, but for defense and war; the demand for the possession of posts like Gibraltar, Malta, Louisburg, at the entrance of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, - posts whose value was chiefly strategic, though not necessarily wholly so. Colonies and colonial posts were sometimes commercial, sometimes military in their character; and it was exceptional that the same position was equally important in both points of view, as New York was."[13]

The three key "things" that Mahan highlights as key to much of the history and policy of nations bordering the sea are "**production**, with the necessity of exchanging products, **shipping**, whereby the exchange is carried on, and **colonies**, which facilitate and enlarge the operations of shipping and tend to protect it by multiplying points of safety."[14] Again, England was a key example in the growing production and trade it had with its many colonies in the Americas, the islands of the Caribbean, and the nations of Africa. Eurasia was also influenced by this great naval power.

It is clear from Mahan's writings that he puts a premium on naval power to insure the commercial development of a nation. Many of the key strategic SLOC issues postulated then are as important today, especially those associated with naval forces "holding in force some vital center (or chokepoint) through which commercial shipping must past."[15] By examining the writings of Mahan, it could be discerned that the consequences for strategic oversight in addressing chokepoints are severe both nationally and internationally.

Mahan, recognized the geopolitical advantages, or disadvantages, of the United States and other nations relative to the SLOCs, both in war and peace. His theory and historical assessment serve as a great point of departure to examine if we have learned from history and to what degree we have shaped policy accordingly.

Geography and Strategy:

There is an important link between the land and sea as it relates to the development of strategy. The essence of this linkage when properly understood by nation-states results in the development of grand strategy which benefits that nation-state in both war and peace. Another label for such grand strategy considerations, in modern parlance, could be geopolitics or strategic geography. A paper published by James E. Toth, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, "Military Strategy Note: Strategic Geography," eloquently explains this by indicating the following:

"Webster defines geography as a science that deals with the earth and its life, especially the description of land, sea, air and the distribution of plant and animal life including man and his industries. This includes the availability and distribution of raw materials, workforce, industries, and the network of man-made infrastructure (railroads, highways, ports, airports, intermodal connections) which link the whole into a useful social, economic, or national defense system. Economics is an overlapping science which deals with the dynamic interaction of these geographic components, particularly as it relates to the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and

services. Geopolitics can be defined as the study of the influence of geography, economics, and demography on the politics and especially the foreign policy of state...."[16]

Toth further suggests that economists and politicians, and geographers debate the scope (and obvious overlap) of their various disciplines; however, geography in strategy is highlighted because it helps visualize strategic relationships and needs. As Napoleon said, "The policy of a state lies in its geography."[17] That is often more clear through inspection of geographical relationships than statistics of productivity and theories of international order.[18]

Mahan focused his efforts in understanding the important seam between land and ocean as it related to the development of man and use of strategic power. In determining whether or not a nation could be a great seapower, he primarily applied geographic considerations. His belief that a great seapower required strategic reach led some nations seeking expanded power to acquire overseas bases and colonies.[19] Hence the geopolitical considerations espoused by Mahan had a great deal of influence on the strategic and military objectives for several nations in the late 19th and early 20th century.[20]

In further analyzing geostrategy, Toth writes, "The primal value in relativity among forces, objects, or states is advantageous position. In the dynamic sense -- whether in the political, military, or commercial realm -- we can call military positional advantage key terrain, the central position, strategic chokepoints and the like."[21] The importance of these positional advantages -- particularly chokepoints -- have intranational and international implications. Toth conveys that,

"Intranational refers to the quantitative and qualitative aspects of national raw materials, agriculture, industry, infrastructure and work force as they relate to one another as sources of national power. The sources of national power (e.g., geographic extent, configuration, and position; population size and characteristics; industrial and technological potential) are not directly

employable but serve as the basis for the instruments of national power (e.g., diplomacy, military action, economic action) which are employable."[22]

Toth further suggests that the international strategic dimension is the correlation of national power and influence among nations as they relate to one another politically, economically, and militarily on the surface of the earth.[23] A few examples referenced by Toth are as follows:

- The key factors in the United States relations with the rest of the world is her relative physical isolation from both Europe and Asia created by our insular location.
- A key factor in Russia's foreign policy is its adjacency with China and Europe as well as Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan: a long common border and the resulting conflict between national objectives, cultures, and resources exacerbate the differences in ideology.
- Finally, consider the military strategy if Alaska were still a part of Russia.[24]

When the U.S. examines global issues as they relate to the military instrument of power it is important to understand that "geography is the fulcrum against which the level of force must be applied."[25] Among other factors, there must be an appreciation of the seas as well as terrain and land form and their affects on national defense and military action. Strategically, you are considering positional advantage relative to generating, using, or thwarting military instruments of power. The position or location of friends and enemies (threats and aggressors) and the geography that is to be traversed by one to get to another will define objectives and key lines of communication via sea (SLOCs) or land. These and associated economic issues will be further examined.

Modern Analysis/Issues:

The economic growth of the United States is closely linked to the world economy as a whole and the majority of that trade is carried on and over the world's oceans.[26] Seaborne commerce exceeds 3.5 billion tons annually and accounts for 80 percent of trade among nations.[27] The U.S. and world economy would soon fail, if the United States could not effectively import and export utilizing sea lines of communication (SLOC).[28] Virtually every aspect of everyone's daily life is touched by goods and services that are ultimately connected to free trade by sea.[29] In addition, sea lines of communication are directly related to America's capability to get forces, equipment and supplies to crisis areas in support of the national interest. The issues associated with SLOCs and chokepoints generically include unimpeded transit on, under, and over (air) these areas. There are numerous international chokepoints that require the interest of the United States. They are regionalized as eight areas considered "U.S. Lifelines and Transit Regions."[30] They are the Gulf of Mexico-Caribbean Sea with the Panama Canal; the North Sea-Baltic Sea with several channels and straits; the Mediterranean-Black Sea with the Strait of Gibraltar and access to Middle Eastern areas; the Western Indian Ocean with the Suez Canal, Bab el Mandeb, the Strait of Hormuz and around South Africa to the Mozambique Channel; the Southeast Asian Seas with the Malacca and Lombok Straits among others and SLOCs passing the Spratly Islands; the Northeast Asian Seas with SLOCs important in access to Japan, Korea, China and Russia; the Southwest Pacific with important SLOC access to Australia; and, the Arctic Ocean with the Bering Strait. The following are economic and

military issues that are prominent in insuring unobstructed passage of these important SLOCs or chokepoints.

According to the American Petroleum Institute, in 1994, for the first time, more than half of the oil used in the United States was imported. The largest supplier, Saudi Arabia, supplies 18.5% of the United States' petroleum needs. Any Saudi oil reaching the United States has to travel more than 8,000 sea miles via the SLOCs in the regions of the Western Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean-Black Sea, and the Gulf of Mexico-Caribbean Sea. Disruption to this type activity not only impacts on the United States but the global economy. This was demonstrated during 1980-1988 in the "Tanker War" between Iran and Iraq. The U.S. interest was to insure the safe passage of non-belligerent ships moving petroleum from the Persian Gulf to Western economies, including the U.S. During this 8 year conflict, 543 ships were attacked, a total of 200 merchant sailors were killed and 53 U.S. lives were lost as a result of attacks on U.S. military vessels. It is important to note that the majority of the ships that were attacked flew flags of nations not associated with the Iran/Iraq conflict; over 80 ships were sunk or declared a total loss which resulted in over $2 billion dollars in direct losses to cargo and hulls. This resulted in hull insurance rates increasing 200 percent worldwide, which, of course, was passed on to the consumers in the form of higher prices. Fears that the tanker war would result in serious disruption of available oil supplies pushed the cost of oil supplies from approximately $13 to $31 per barrel.[31] Total cost to the world economy was projected by some to exceed $200 billion dollars.[32] The United States heavy dependence on Persian Gulf oil, currently in the

vicinity of 9.8 million Bbls per day, seems to be irreversible in the foreseeable future.[33] This part of the world remains unstable and potentially volatile.

Arguably, the region of the Southeast Asian Seas is the most prominent of all regions, considering the sheer volume of merchant shipping transiting this region. This area includes the Straits of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok. It also encompasses the SLOC on the South China Sea passing the Spratly Islands. These sea lanes carry almost half the world's merchant shipping and large percentages of Asian trade pass through a few key straits. In 1993, over half the world's merchant fleet capacity (tonnage) -- more than one-third of the world's ships (number of ships) -- sailed through the Straits of Malacca, Sundra, or Lombok, or sailed past the Spratly Islands.[34] This level of shipping underscores the significance of this region.

Shipping traffic through Malacca is several times greater than the traffic through either the Suez or Panama canals.[35]Over one-half trillion dollars ($568 billion) of long hauled interregional seaborne shipment, passed through these chokepoints in 1993.[36] This represents over 15 percent of all the world's cross-border trade, excluding trade within the region. Over 40% of trade from Japan, Australia and the nations of Southeast Asia pass through these chokepoints.[37] Over one quarter of the imports of the Newly Industrialized Economies (NIE) of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea pass through these SLOCs.[38] Consequently, the economic strength of these countries and their trading partners is dependent on uncontested passage through these SLOCs.

In 1993, the United States was third in shipping, in terms of "capacity ships" owned passing through the Strait of Malacca, behind Japan and Greece. The extent of merchant

shipping in this area and the associated significance of the SLOCs can be summarized as follows: "Over half of all interregional tonnage passing through Malacca is either coming from or going to the Arab Gulf (Western Indian Ocean Region). About half of interregional tonnage through Malacca is either coming from or going to Southeast Asia. Over a third of tonnage is going to or coming from Japan, and next in shipping volume are the Newly Industrialized Economies (NIEs) of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea."[39] In 1993, United States maritime exports represented 3.3% of the world's (or 11.1 million tons) which traversed the SLOCs at a value of $15 billion dollars.[40]

The South Eastern Asian region is not without security concerns which may affect the SLOCs. Several nations claim part or all of the Spratly Islands and, by extension, claim rights over the waters adjacent the islands.[41] China, Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam all have garrisons on the atolls and have claimed sovereignty over the adjacent waters. In addition, Indonesia has considered seeking control of shipping among its islands under a policy of "archipelagic sea lines." Indonesia is among 17 states declaring sovereignty over the waters, and SLOCs, which are enclosed within its archipelagic state. The straits in the Indonesian Archipelago are important for direct and cost-effective maritime activity, linking the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Finally, because of oil spills associated with accidents in the Strait of Malacca, the international community has considered regulations of shipping for environmental concerns and maritime safety.[42]

From a military perspective, recent events in North Korea, Haiti, Rwanda, Iraq, and the Balkans remind everyone how dangerous and uncertain the world remains after the Cold War. The Department of Defense's, National Security and the Convention on the Law of

the Sea, publication delineates the following as post Cold War threats to U.S. interests and world order relative to these areas:[43]

- Ethnic rivalry and separatist violence within and without national borders
- Regional tensions in areas such as the Middle East and Northeast Asia
- Humanitarian crises of natural or other origin resulting in starvation, strife, or mass migration patterns
- Conflict over mineral and living resources including those that straddle territorial or maritime zones
- Terrorist attacks and piracy against U.S. persons, property, or shipping overseas or on the high seas.

The shift from a bipolar to multipolar world has precipitated different challenges for the United States. Unchanged, however, is the reality that many U.S. economic, political and military interests are located distant from the United States. The United States has historically been and remains a maritime nation. It must maintain the maritime capability to project its military forces to locations across the globe in defense of its vital interests. The United States considers it vital that SLOCs remain open as a matter of international right.[44] This is essential for implementing the national security strategy.[45] The United States doesn't want to see passage through the SLOCs become contingent upon approval by coastal or island nations.[46] Impediments to global mobility through key chokepoints could cause obvious delays in response time for military forces -- e.g., from the east coast to the Persian Gulf is 20 days via the Suez Canal, 26 days via South Africa. The United States response to any aggression must be unobstructed and rapid as recently indicated in

1994 by troop and equipment deployment in response to "saber rattling" by Iraq. Additional examples highlighted by the Department of Defense are as follows:[47]

- Before and during the Persian Gulf War, the U.S. and other coalition naval and air forces traversed the critical chokepoints of Hormuz and Bab el Mandeb. In preparation for Operation Desert Storm, 3.4 million tons of dry cargo and 6.6 million tons of fuel had to be transported to U.S. and allied forces in the Gulf. Ninety-five percent of the cargo moved by ship through the straits.
- If prevented from transiting through the Indonesian Archipelago and the Malacca Straits, a battle group transiting from Yokosuka, Japan to Bahrain would have to reroute around Australia. Assuming a steady 15 knot pace, the six ship battle group (all consuming conventional fuel) would require an additional 15 days to transit an additional 5,800 nautical miles. Additional fuel cost would be approximately $7.0 million.

In addition, United States routinely transfers naval forces from the Mediterranean area to Central Command's area of responsibility (AOR). The U.S. can, therefore, ill afford a strategy that doesn't properly address unobstructed passage over, under, and on key SLOCs. The alternative cost in time and resources is tremendous. The possible cost in national security interests may be far greater.

Regional Threats:

Where are the principal economic and regional concerns which require focus on SLOCs? First, there is the Middle East. Saddam Hussein's hegemonic activities continue

to be a concern in maintaining both economic and military regional stability. In addition, state sponsored terrorism by Libya and Iran contribute to concerns about regional, as well as European, stability.

Second, in Northeast Asia, North Korea and its pursuit of a nuclear capability exacerbates regional tension. The U.S. has historically been committed to the defense of South Korea, serving to maintain the balance of power and stability on the Korean peninsula. Also, the United States seeks to prevent any Asian nation from threatening its neighbors.[48] The growth of Asia as a trading partner also makes plain the United States interests in the area.[49]

Third, maintaining stability within the western hemisphere has always been of concern. A stable democracy in Haiti and a democratic Cuba are but two examples within the western hemisphere. Also, stability in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala remains important. The international drug trade in this area will be addressed later.

Fourth, the continuing unrest in Bosnia continues to disrupt regional stability. Today, the U.S. remains committed to achieving stability, indicated by the ongoing peacekeeping operation.

Fifth, the prevention of genocide by intervention in Africa, like Rwanda and Somalia, or working via the UN to promote stability between warring states like Angola and Mozambique, or calming civil strife in South Africa and Namibia preclude the second or third order affects of massive population shifts, impacting the world economies. SLOCs are important for U.S. favorable influence on such political/military circumstances.

Finally, the U.S. continues to keep an eye on the regional dispute over the Spratly Islands, though it doesn't seem likely that anything significant would occur to threaten SLOC or security interest.

The foregoing are not all inclusive in addressing U.S. foreign policy interests associated with security and economic concerns. In addition, the order in which they are addressed is unrelated to national priority. The underpinning of all is an immediate or a potential requirement to influence the situations for the importance of world economic and security reasons. The impact on SLOCs range from significant in the Middle East and Southeast Asia to minimal around the coastal areas of Africa. However, all situations would likely require the movement of naval forces and equipment to crisis areas along key SLOCs to influence U.S. security or economic interests.

Transnational Threat: Drug Trafficking:

The international drug trade is an increasing threat to global stability. The narcotics trade is a multi-billion dollar endeavor. Money is used to finance terrorist organizations as well as economic growth for some trafficking countries. It is a problem to which the U.S. dedicates about $16 billion dollars annually. To develop an appreciation of this problem, one can examine Burma (Myanmar). Dennis Bernstein and Leslie Kean published an article in the Washington Post on this matter entitled, "People of the Opiate." The article indicates that Burma is the world's biggest heroin producer. The United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP) regional conference, November 1996, indicated that the Asian drug trade reaps an annual income of $63 billion.[50] Burma, the largest exporter, provides

more than 50 percent of the world's supply.[51] Bernstein and Kean further highlight the integration of narco-dollars into Burma's national economy. At least 50 percent of Burma's economy is unaccounted for and extralegal. Exports alone appear to be worth about as much as all legal exports. There is a direct correlation between the rise in heroin production in Burma and a resurgence of heroin use in the past five years in the United States.[52] Import , and likewise heroin consumption, has doubled since the mid-eighties. The amount of Burmese heroin sold in New York City has tripled since 1989. U.S. officials indicate that 60 percent of the heroin ceased in this country is Burmese.[53] Bernstein and Kean finally cite that the heroin pipeline from Burma to the economy is open full blast, and mainlining has become trendy among the U.S. youth; a San Francisco police sergeant indicated that buying heroin in his city is "as easy as buying a pack of cigarettes."[54] It appears that any success achieved by international efforts to eradicate this trade could result in retaliation.

Burma is just one example. The reality is that drugs are being exported to the U.S. from Pakistan, other parts of Asia, and South America.[55] All these areas have discovered the Pacific trafficking lanes to be most successful. This SLOC becomes key because it is not a natural chokepoint which facilitates identification and search. Rather, the open sea lane of the Pacific allows ships to avoid authorities, reach key points at western ports of Mexico for subsequent transportation throughout the United States. Problems of drug interdiction in the eastern Pacific are exacerbated because the U.S. has few bilateral agreements with Pacific Coast nations for law enforcement cooperation such as the ones it has developed over the years throughout the Caribbean.[56] Consequently, the U.S. is

beginning to see the importance of a key SLOC not as a chokepoint but for the advantages it provides to the transnational threat of drug trafficking.

U.S. Strategy:

The United States' strategy of ensuring unobstructed transit through chokepoints/SLOCs is captured in the Convention on the Law of the Sea (LOS) treaty. Though the United States has not officially ratified the treaty, because of the seabed mining issue, it has agreed to apply the treaty provisionally. The Departments of Defense, State and Commerce are in full support of this treaty which is currently being considered in Congress. The U.S. interest in the treaty was best expressed by former Secretary of Defense William Perry: "We support the Convention because it confirms traditional high seas freedoms of navigation and overflight; it details passage rights through international straits (chokepoints); and it reduces prospects for disagreements with coastal states during operations."[57] The LOS Convention addresses U.S. national security interests, as an example (which is reprinted from National Security and the Convention on the Law of the Sea, Second Edition, January 1996, by The U.S. Department of Defense, Washington D.C.):

- Preserve freedoms of navigation and overflight on high seas.
- Maintain these high seas freedoms in the 200 NM Exclusive Economic Zones of coastal States (e.g., Vietnam).
- Guarantee freedom of navigation and overflight through international straits (most crucial are Gibraltar, Hormuz, and Malacca).

- Establish the regime of archipelagic sea lanes passage (for transit through strategically located archipelagoes, such as Indonesia and the Philippines).
- Guarantee passage through foreign territorial seas along with a clear delineation of coastal State regulatory authority.
- Limit the width of the territorial sea to twelve nautical miles.
- Establish more objective rules for drawing baselines for measuring maritime zones (restrains coastal States from extending their jurisdictional reach farther seaward).
- Preserve the sovereign immune status of our warships and other public vessels and aircraft.

Since 1979, the basis for the Departments of Defense and State in countering excessive maritime claims has been the Freedom of Navigation (FON) program. The LOS will create a universal method of behavior and a improved manner in resolving conflict via the Convention vice solely diplomatic and operational approaches.

The U.S. National Military Strategy (NMS) of promoting stability and thwarting aggression via power projection is inextricably linked to SLOC passage. The three essential components of the NMS are peacetime engagement, deterrence and conflict prevention, and fighting and winning the nation's wars. Key to this strategy is the forward deployment of forces, especially for crisis response. Maritime forces are forward deployed to enhance the NMS and ensure that SLOCs remain open. Maritime forces for the United States are the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. Navy and Marine forces are

strategically deployed in areas of special interest to the United States and possess the capability to rapidly close potential crisis areas.

There are, however, several circumstances reshaping U.S. security interests in the seas and the corresponding naval strategy, as highlighted in a issue of the Strategic Forum, published by the Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University.[58]

First, the post Cold War U.S. military strategy has adjusted to properly address multiple regional interests and challenges. United States maritime forces redefined their focus to adjust to these challenges with emphasis on power projection. This was initially verbalized in the 1992 Navy and Marine Corps White Paper, "From the Sea," and later amplified in "Forward from the Sea." The anticipated missions included traditional roles such as presence, strategic deterrence, sea control (SLOC passage), crisis response, power projection and sealift. Embargoes, counternarcotics operations, and humanitarian operations define the peacetime roles.

Second, the naval forces are adjusting to the realities of budget cuts and the impact on naval strategy. Based on the Secretary of Defense's 1990 Base Force Concept, the Navy is reducing personnel and operating expenses by one-third. By the end of the century the navy is anticipated to have 330 ships, a decrease from the nearly 600 ships operating in 1988. Integration of naval forces with other services and interoperability with allied forces and the redesign of fundamental operations is being emphasized to precipitate savings.

The challenge to U.S. maritime forces is to remain flexible in preparing for current missions, to include SLOC passage, and adapt to new ones in view of the unpredictable future international scene and force reductions. The U.S. naval forces could find

themselves stretched thin in the face of several crises engaging U.S. interests and thereby necessitating simultaneous response. Currently, the importance of naval forces securing SLOCs is constant. This will ensure access and sustainment for all other forces committed in a crisis.

Conclusions:

The military, economic and political importance of the seas lines of communication have remained fundamentally unchanged, since Mahan wrote on this issue. Sea lines of communication (SLOCs) are essential geopolitical considerations when developing strategy. Mahan understood the importance of this during his lifetime but has the issue of SLOCs been properly addressed by our strategy in this post cold war world -- the fundamental thrust of this research?

The answer is captured in a 1994, Department of Defense White Paper, "National Security and the Convention of the Law of the Sea:"

"National Security interests in having a stable oceans regime are, if anything, even more important today than in 1982, when the world had a roughly bipolar political dimension and the U.S. had more abundant forces to project power to wherever it was needed....Without international respect for the freedoms of navigation and overflight set forth in the (LOC) Convention, exercise of our forces' mobility rights would be jeopardized. Disputes with littoral states could delay action and be resolved only by protracted political discussions. The response time for U.S. and allied/coalition forces based away from potential areas of conflict could lengthen...Forces may arrive on the scene too late to make a difference, affecting our ability to influence the course of events consistent with our interest and treaty obligations."[59]

Similar support has been voiced by the former Secretary of State, Warren Christopher. As a result, President Clinton submitted a letter to the Congress, 7 October 1994, recommending ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

In essence, the United States clearly understands the importance of SLOCs and is pursuing policies that will, among other things, ensure that unimpeded sea lanes will remain for the transit of military and commercial vessels. The preeminent means to securing this assurance rests within Congressional ratification of the United Nations Law of Sea (LOS), an international treaty that has been ratified by the required 60 countries. With changes in the previous controversial seabed mining provision, the United States is favorably considering ratification.

History has demonstrated, however, that the U.S. and the world have not always had the benefit of dealing with rational actors who will favorably embrace agreements like the LOS Convention. Some states will remain outside the LOS Convention. Regimes with desires of hegemony, have threatened their neighbors and important SLOCs as recently as 1990 in the Middle East, and the current tensions over the Spratlys in the Asia-Pacific region will continue to potentially threaten U.S. interests and allies. Therefore, and as always, national strategy should be complimented by military strategy. The need for maintaining naval operations in the defense of freedom of navigation remains. Resources needed to carry out this effort must be directed into reduced Department of the Navy and State Department budgets. Current indications portend a continued reduction in the federal budget and national security resources continually challenged in meeting global crises.

Finally, the importance of forward presence in deterrence remains important for SLOC protection. The U.S. should take a more critical view in reexamining national strategy and the national military strategy vis-à-vis the rapid downsizing of forces relative to the

geopolitical issues associated with SLOCs. Deterrence and power projection elevate the importance of SLOCs to the national security strategy (supported by the national military strategy) in that U.S. maritime forces will require timely, uninterrupted passage during crisis. Moreover, a failure in deterrence has potential to disrupt a stable world economy if a measured timely response is negatively impacted by our inability to flow forces through the SLOCs. Though the LOS Convention may create an environment to rationally address SLOC issues, again, history is replete with irrational actors. The irrational acts of hegemons, religious zealots, and nationalist (China/Taiwan) and the second and third order affects of their disruptions should not be overlooked by the U.S. when assessing the geopolitical issues of SLOCs. Though the LOS Convention treaty may be a positive development, the future military force structure may be strained to continually ensure SLOC security for commercial and military requirements. Miscalculation in reexamining this most important geopolitical issue has the potential for major U.S. and global disruption across the political, economic and military spectrum.

ENDNOTES

[1] Colonel James E. Toth, USMC (Ret.), "Military Strategy Note: Strategic Geography," ICAF, 1995, 1.
[2] Ibid. 6.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] LtCol Michael Lee Lanning, USA (Ret.), The Military 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Military Leaders of All Time (Secaucus: Carol, 1996), 147.
[6] Ibid. 147.
[7] Ibid. 148.
[8] Toth, 4.
[9] Allen Westcott, Mahan On Naval Warfare (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1948), 77.
[10] Ibid., 78.
[11] Ibid., 5.
[12] Ibid., 94.
[13] Ibid., 20.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Toth, 1.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 2.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] U.S. Department of Defense, National Security and the Convention on the Law of the Sea, Second Edition, January 1996, 11.
[27] Ibid.
[28] U.S. Navy, "Freedom of Navigation to Trade, Freedom to Fish," All Hands Magazine, January 1995, 21.
[29] Ibid.
[30] U.S. Department of Defense, 6.
[31] Ibid., 12.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] John H. Noer and David Gregory, Chokepoints: Maritime Economic Concerns in Southeast Asia (Washington, D.C.: NDU, 1996), 3.
[35] Ibid., 3.
[36] Ibid., 4.

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 9.
[40] Ibid., 23.
[41] Ibid., 31.
[42] Ibid., 32.
[43] U.S. Department of Defense, 9.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., 5.
[48] Kluwer Law International, "The Pursuit of American Foreign Policy Interests," Foreign Policy Bulletin, Vol. 7, No. 5, Sep/Oct 1996, 30.
[49] Ibid., 30.
[50] Dennis Bernstein and Leslie Kean, "People of the Opiate," The Baltimore Sun, 22 December 1996, p. 5F.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Molly Moore, "Latin Drugs Flow North via Pacific: Traffickers' Ships Hard to Intercept," Washington Post, 30 January 1997, A-16.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Institute for National Strategic Studies, "U.S. Security Challenges in Transition, Oceans and the Law," Strategic Assessment 1995, <http://198.80.36.91/ndu/inss/sa95/sach08co.html>, 1.
[58] Ann L. Hollick, "Ocean Law: Senate Approval of the UN Convention," Strategic Forum, No. 41, August 1995, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., p. 2-3.
[59] Institute for National Strategic Studies, "U.S. Security Interests," Strategic Assessment 1995, <http://198.80.36.91/ndu/inss/sa95/sach0802.html>, p. 2.

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