

NAVAL POLICY

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EVERY country that has a satisfactory navy has acquired it as the result of a far-seeing naval policy, not of opportunism or of chance. The country has first studied the question thoroughly, then decided what it ought to do, then decided how to do it.

Naval policy has to deal with three elements: material, personnel and operations, which though separate, are mutually dependent. A clear comprehension of their actual relations and relative weights can be obtained only by thorough study; but without that comprehension no wise naval policy can be formulated, and therefore no satisfactory navy can be established.

The most obvious thing about a navy is its material: the ponderous battleships, the picturesque destroyers, the submarines, the intricate engines of multifarious types, the radio, the signal flags, the torpedo that costs eight thousand dollars, the gun that can sink a ship ten miles away.

The United States Navy ever since its beginning in 1775 has excelled in its material; the ships have always been good, and in many cases they have surpassed those of similar kind in other navies. This has been due to the strong commonsense of the American people, their engineering skill and their inventive genius. The first warship to move under steam was the American ship *Demologos*, sometimes called the *Fulton the First*, constructed in 1813; the first electric torpedoes were American; the first submarine to do effective work in war was American; the first turret ship, the *Monitor*, was American; the first warship to use a screw propeller was the *Princeton*, an American; the naval telescope-sight was American. American ships now are not only well constructed, but all their equipments are of the best; and to-day

the American battleship is the finest and most powerful vessel of her class in the world.

Our personnel, too, has always been good. The American seaman has always excelled, and so has the American gunner. No ships have ever been better handled than the American ships; no naval battles in history have been conducted with more skill and daring than those of American ships; no exploits in history surpass those of Cushing, Hobson and Decatur.

In operations, however, in the handling of the navy as a whole, we have never excelled; though no better individual fleet leaders shine in the pages of all history than Farragut and Dewey. The strategical operating of our material and personnel has not been in accordance with carefully laid plans, but has been left largely to the inspiration of the commander on the spot, both in peace and in war. Material has suffered from lack of a naval policy, but only quantitatively, because material is a subject that the people understand. Personnel has suffered more, because the people fail to realize the amount of training needed to make a personnel competent to perform their tasks successfully, in competition with the highly-trained men of other navies. But operations have suffered incomparably more than material and personnel; because naturally the people do not comprehend the supreme importance of being ready, when war breaks out, to operate the material and personnel skilfully against an active enemy, in accordance with well prepared strategic plans; nor do they realize how difficult and long would be the task of preparing and testing out those plans. Therefore, they fail to provide the necessary administrative machinery.

In fact, the kind and amount of machinery needed to conduct operations skilfully and quickly cannot be decided wisely, until the country adopts some naval policy; and in naval policy the United States must be admitted to have lagged behind almost every other civilized country. Spurred as we were to exertion by the coming of the Revolutionary War, we constructed hastily, though with skill, the splendid ships that did service in that war. But after the war, interest in the navy waned; and if it had not been for the enormous tribute demanded by the pirates of the Barbary Coast from our Government, and a realization of the fact that not only was it cheaper to build ships and fight the pirates than

to pay the tribute, but that paying the tribute was a disgraceful act, our navy would have run down even more than it did. Yet even with this warning, 1812 found our navy in a desperate condition. Rallying to the emergency, though too late to accomplish much practical result, we built a number of excellent ships, against the votes of many highly influential men in Congress. These ships did gallant service, and redeemed the reputation of Americans from the oft repeated charge of being cowards and merely commercial men, though they were too few to prevent the blockade which British squadrons maintained on our Atlantic Coast. After the war, the navy was again allowed to deteriorate; and although our ships were excellent, and the officers and men were excellent, and although the war with Mexico supplied some stimulation, the War of the Rebellion caught us in a very bad predicament. The country rose to this emergency too slowly, as before; but the enemy were even less prepared than we, so that during the four years of the Civil War we were able to construct, man, and buy several hundred ships of various kinds; with the result that, at the end of the war, our navy, if not quite so powerful as Great Britain's, was at least very close to it, and with a recent experience in actual war which the British Navy did not possess.

After that war, the same story was repeated. The people convinced themselves that they would never again be forced to go to war; that they had seen the folly of it, and the misery of it, and would devote themselves thereafter to the delightful pursuits of peace. Gradually the fighting ships of the ironclad class were allowed to go to pieces; gradually even the larger ships of the wooden sailing class fell into disrepair; gradually the idea of war faded from the minds even of naval officers; gradually squadrons and fleets, as such, were broken up, and our ships were to be found scattered singly over all the seas, and swinging idly at their anchors in pleasant ports.

Fortunately, Admiral Luce and a very few other officers had learned the salient lessons of war during the rebellion, and sturdily stood up against the decadent tendency of the times. Against much opposition, Luce succeeded in founding the Naval War College at Newport, where the study of war as an art in itself was to be prosecuted, and in enlisting Captain Mahan in the work. In a few years Mahan gave to the world that epochal book, *The Influence of Sea Power*

upon History (embodying his lectures before the War College), which stirred the nations of Europe to such a realization of the significance of naval history, and such a comprehension of the efficacy of naval power, that they entered upon a determined competition for acquiring naval power, which continues to this day.

Meanwhile, a little before 1880, the people became aroused to the fact that though the country was growing richer, their navy was becoming weaker, while the navies of certain European countries were becoming stronger. So they began in 1880 the construction of what was then called "the new navy." The construction of the new ships was undertaken upon the lines of the ships then building abroad, which were in startling contrast with the useless old-fashioned American ships which then were flying our flag.

The construction of the material of the navy has progressed since then, but spasmodically. At every session of Congress tremendous efforts have been made by people desiring an adequate navy, and tremendous resistance has been made by people who believed that we required no navy, or at least only a little navy. The country at large has taken a bystander's interest in the contest, not knowing much about the pros and cons, but feeling in an indolent fashion that we needed some navy, though not much. The result has been, not a reasonable policy, but a succession of unreasonable compromises between the aims of the extremists on both sides.

Great Britain, on the other hand, has always regarded the navy question as one of the most difficult and important before the country, and has adopted, and for centuries has maintained, a definite naval policy. This does not mean that she has followed a rigid naval policy; for a naval policy, to be efficient, must be able to accommodate itself quickly to rapid changes in international situations, and to meet sudden dangers from even unexpected quarters—as the comparatively recent experience of Great Britain shows. At the beginning of this century the British Navy was at the height of its splendor and self-confidence. Britannia ruled the waves, and Britannia's ships and squadrons enforced Britannia's policies in every sea. The next most powerful navy was that of France; but it was not nearly so large, and seemed to be no more efficient, in proportion to its size. Due to Britain's wise and continuing

policy, and the excellence of the British sailor and his ships, the British Navy proudly and almost tranquilly held virtual command of all the seas.

But shortly after this century began, British officers discerned a new and disturbing element gradually developing on the horizon. The first thing which roused their attention to it was the unexpected attack of the Japanese torpedo boats on the Russian squadron in Port Arthur. No war had been declared, and the Russian squadron was riding peacefully at anchor. The suddenness of the attack, and the distinct though incomplete success which it achieved, startled the British into a realization of the fact that there had been introduced into warfare on the sea methods and tactics requiring a higher order of preparation than had ever before been known; that the scientific methods which the Germans employed so effectively on land in 1870 had been adapted by the Japanese to naval warfare, and would necessitate the introduction into naval policies of speedier methods than had hitherto been needed.

Another event which had happened shortly before showed that naval policies would have to be modified, if they were to utilize recent advances in scientific methods. This event was the unprecedented success at target practise of *H. M. S. Terrible*, commanded by Captain Sir Percy Scott, which proved that by a long and strenuous training and the adoption of instruments of precision, it was possible to attain a skill in naval gunnery never attained before. Up to this moment the British Navy had almost despised gunnery. Inheriting the traditions brought down from Howe, Rodney and Nelson, permeated with the ideals of the "blue water school," proud of being British seamen, proud of the pure white of their ships, enamored of the stimulating breeziness of the quarter deck and bridge, imbued with almost a contempt for such mathematical sciences as were not directly used in practical navigation, British naval officers exalted seamanship as the acme of their art, and took little interest in gunnery. All the battles of the past had been won by dash and seamanship and dogged persistence. Ships had always fought close alongside each other. No science had ever won any naval battle of the past, so why should they bother with science now—and why should they bother with target practise, except just enough to insure that the battery was in order, and that the men were not afraid of their guns?

Besides, target practise dirtied the ship—a sacrilege to the British naval officer.

But the events of the war between Japan and Russia, especially the naval battles of Port Arthur, August 10th, 1904, and the Sea of Japan, May 27th, 1905, rivetted their attention on the fact that something more than seamanship and navigation and clean ships would be needed, if the British Navy was to maintain her proud supremacy on the sea; for in these battles, overwhelming victories were won purely by superior skill in gunnery, strategy and tactics.

To these causes of awakening was added one still greater, but of like import—the rapid rise of the German Navy from a position of comparative unimportance to one which threatened the British Navy itself. The fact became gradually evident to British officers that the German Navy was proceeding along the same lines as had proceeded the German Army. Realizing the efficiency of the German Government, noting the public declarations of the German Emperor, observing the excellence of the German ships, the skill of the German naval officers, and the extraordinary energy which the German people were devoting to the improvement of the German Navy—the British Navy took alarm.

So did the other navies.

Beginning about 1904, Great Britain set to work with energy to reform her naval policy. Roused to action by the sense of coming danger, she augmented the size and number of vessels of all types; increased the personnel of all classes, regular and reserve; scrapped all obsolete craft; built (secretly) the epocal *Dreadnought*, and modernized in all particulars the British Navy. In every great movement one man always stands pre-eminent. The man in this case was Admiral Sir John Fisher, First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, afterwards Lord Fisher. Fisher brought about vital changes in the organization, methods, and even the spirit of the navy. He depleted the overgrown foreign squadrons, concentrated the British force in powerful fleets near home, established the War College, inculcated the study of strategy and tactics, appointed Sir Percy Scott as inspector of target practise, put the whole weight of his influence on the side of gunnery and efficiency, placed officers in high command who had the military idea as distinguished from the idea of the “blue water school,” and imbued the entire service with the avowed

idea that they must get ready to fight to the death, not the French Navy, with its easy-going methods, but the German Navy, allied perhaps with some other navy. At the Admiralty he introduced methods analogous to those of the General Staff, to maintain the navy ready for instant service at all times, to prepare and keep up to date mobilization plans in the utmost detail, and to arrange plans for the conduct of war in such wise that after a war should break out, all the various probable situations would have been studied out in advance.

The work required at the Admiralty, and still more in the fleet,—night and day and in all weathers,—taxed mental and physical endurance to the limit; but the result was complete success; for when war broke out on the first of August, 1914, the British Navy was absolutely ready. Many complaints have appeared in print about the unreadiness of Great Britain; but no one who knows anything of the facts supposes that these criticisms include Great Britain's Navy.

The United States Navy in the early part of this century occupied, relatively to others, a very ill-defined position; but the increased interest taken in it by our people after the Spanish War, combined with the destruction of the flower of the Russian fleet in the Russo-Japanese War, and the crushing blow inflicted on the French Navy by the mal-administration of M. Pelletan, resulted in placing our navy, about three years ago, in a position second only to Great Britain's—a position which it recently has lost. Due to a common origin and language, our navy has always followed the British Navy, though at a somewhat respectful distance; and while it is true that in point of mechanical inventions we are ahead, in seamanship, navigation and engineering on a par, and in gunnery and tactics not far behind, yet we must admit that in policy and in policy's first cousin, strategy, we are very far in the rear.

There are many reasons why this should be, the first being that the British Navy has nearly always lived under more stimulating conditions than we, because the probability of war has seemed greater, and because the United States has underestimated what reasonable probability there has been, and failed to realize how tremendously difficult would be the task of getting ready for it. Due to the present war our people have gradually come to see that they must get more ships and other material; but they realize this as

only a measure of urgency, and not as a matter of policy. If the emergency passes us by in safety, the people may see in this fact only a confirmation of their notion that war can be postponed *ad infinitum*, and may therefore fail to take due precautions for the future. If so, when we at last become involved in a sudden war, we shall be as unprepared as now; and, relatively to some aggressive nation which, foreseeing this, may purposely prepare itself, we shall be more unprepared.

A curious phase of the navy question in our country is the fact that very few people, even the most extreme partisans for or against a large navy, have ever studied it as a problem, and endeavored to arrive at a correct solution. Few have realized that it is a problem, in the strictest sense of the word; and that unless one approaches it as such his conclusions cannot be correct except by accident.

In Germany, on the other hand, and equally in Japan, the question has been taken up as a concrete problem, just as definite as a problem in engineering. They have used for solving it the method called "The Estimate of the Situation," originated by the German General Staff, which is now adopted in all the armies and navies of civilized countries for the solution of military problems. Previous to the adoption of this method the general procedure had been such as is now common in civil life, when a number of people forming a group desire to make a decision as to what they will do in any given contingency. The usual procedure is for some one to suggest that a certain thing be done, then for somebody else to suggest that something else be done, and so on; and then finally for the group to make a decision which is virtually a compromise. This procedure is faulty, and the decisions resulting are apt to be unwise; because it is quite possible that some very important factors may be overlooked, and equally possible that some other factors be given undue weight. Furthermore, a measure advocated by a man who has the persuasive and emotional abilities of the orator is more apt to be favorably considered than a measure advocated by a man not possessing those abilities.

In the "Estimate of the Situation" method, on the other hand, the orator has no opportunity, because the procedure is simply an accurate process of reasoning. It is divided into four parts. The first part consists of a careful study of the "mission," ending in a clear determination of what the

“mission” really is—that is: *what is the thing which it is desired to do?* The second part consists of a careful study, and eventually a clear comprehension, of the difficulties in the way; the third part consists of a careful study, and eventually a clear comprehension, of what facilities are available with which to overcome the difficulties; the fourth part consists of a careful study of the mission, difficulties and facilities, in their mutual relations, and a “decision” as to what should therefore be done.

Military and naval people are so thoroughly convinced of the value of this method that they always employ it when making important decisions, writing down the various factors and the successive steps in regular order and in complete detail.

In this country, while naval and military people use this method in their comparatively minor problems, the country at large does not use it in deciding the major problem: that is, in deciding how much navy they want, and of what composition. They do not take even the first step toward formulating a naval policy, because they do not study the “mission” of the navy; that is, *they do not study the international and national situations and their bearing on the need for a navy.* Yet until they do this they will not be in a sufficiently informed condition of mind to conclude what the “mission” is; that is, what they wish the navy to be able to do; because, before they can formulate the mission they must resolve what foreign navy or navies that mission must include. If they conclude that the mission of the navy is to guard our coast and trade routes against the hostile efforts of Liberia the resulting naval policy will be simple and inexpensive; while if they conclude that the mission of our navy is to guard our coast and trade routes against the hostile acts of *any* navy the resulting naval policy will be so difficult and costly as to tax the brain and wealth of the country to a degree that will depend on *the time at which the country decides that the navy must be ready to fulfil that mission.*

This factor reminds us of another factor: *the minimum time in which the navy can get ready to fulfil a given mission* (for instance, to protect us against any navy); and we cannot decide the mission correctly without taking this factor into account. For example, it would be foolish to decide that the mission of our navy is to protect us *now*

against any navy, including the greatest, when it would take us at least twenty years to develop and train a navy to accomplish that task; and it would be equally foolish to decide that the mission is to protect us against any navy *except* the greatest, because such a decision could rest on no other ground than present improbability of conflict with the greatest navy, or improbability for the very few years ahead (say two or three) which we poor mortals can forecast.

This reasoning seems to indicate that the first step in formulating a naval policy for the United States is to realize that any conclusion as to which navies should be included in the mission of our navy must not exclude any navy about whose peaceful conduct towards us we can entertain a reasonable doubt, *during the period of time which we would require to get ready to meet her*. For instance, inasmuch as it would take us at least twenty years to get ready to protect ourselves against the hostile efforts of the British Navy, we cannot exclude even that navy from a consideration of the mission of our own, unless we entertain no doubt of the peaceful attitude of that navy towards us for at least that twenty years.

Clearly, the problem is not only very important but very difficult—perhaps the most difficult single problem before the country; and for this reason, naval officers have long marvelled that the leading minds of the country do not undertake it. Perhaps one reason is that they do not know how difficult it is: that they do not realize the extraordinary complexity of modern ships and engines, and the trained skill required to handle them; that they do not realize what Great Britain now realizes, that we must prepare for one of the most stupendous struggles ever carried on; that we must have a personnel both of officers and enlisted men trained to the highest point, because they will have to meet officers and enlisted men trained to the highest point; that the training must be such that the skill produced can be exercised by night and day, in cold and heat, in storm and calm, under circumstances of the utmost possible difficulty and danger; that, while it takes four years to build a ship and get her into the fleet as an effective unit, it takes much longer to train an enlisted petty officer as he should be trained, and a lifetime to train officers of the upper grades. Perhaps also our leading minds do not realize the intellectual requirements of the higher realms of the naval art, or com-

prehend what the examples of Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Nelson and Farragut prove: that, *in the real crises of a nation's life her most valuable asset is the trained skill in strategy that directs the movements of her forces.*

Further than this, they may not realize that the greater the danger which they must avert, the earlier they must begin to prepare for it, because the more work in preparation will have to be performed; and yet realization of this truth is absolutely vital, as is also realization of the fact that we have no military Power as our ally, and therefore must be ready to meet alone a hostile attack (though perhaps in the far distant future) from *any* foreign Power. To see that this is true it is merely necessary to note the facts of history, and observe how nations that have long been on terms of friendship have suddenly found themselves at war with each other; and how countries which have always been hostile have found themselves fighting side by side. In the present war, Great Britain is allied with the two countries toward which, more than toward any other, she has been hostile; and she is fighting the country to which, more than any other, she is bound by ties of consanguinity and common interests. The history of war is so filled with alternations of peace and war between every pair of contiguous countries as to suggest the thought that the mere fact of two countries having interests that are common is a reason why those interests may conflict; that countries which have no common interests have nothing to fight about; that it is only for things in which two nations are interested, and that both desire, that those two nations fight.

If our estimate of the situation should lead us to the decision that we must prepare our navy in such a way that, say twenty years hence, it will be able to protect the country against any enemy, we shall then instinctively adopt a policy. The fact of having ahead of us a definite, difficult thing to do, will at once take us out of the region of guess work, and force us into logical methods. We shall realize the problem in its entirety; we shall see the relation of one part to another, and of all the parts to the whole; we shall realize that the deepest study of the wisest men must be devoted to it, as it is in all maritime countries except our own. The very difficulties of the problem, the very scope and greatness of it, the fact that national failure or national success will hinge on the way we solve it, will call into action the pro-

foundest minds in all the nation. We will realize that, more than any other problem before the country, this problem is urgent; because in no other problem have we so much lost time to make up for, and in no other work of the Government are we so far behind the great nations that we may have to contend against.

Great Britain was startled into a correct estimate of the situation ten years ago, and at once directed perhaps the best of her ability to meet it. Certain it is that no other department of the British Government is in such good condition as the navy; in no other department has the problem been so thoroughly understood, and so conscientiously worked out, or the success been so triumphant. Whatever it was expected or desired that the British Navy should do the British Navy has done; and though its success has not been so spectacular as the successes of Lord Howe and Nelson, and though many are restless under the forced inaction of the fleet, yet the confidence of Great Britain is given unreservedly to her navy, and her most vital interests are committed to its keeping.

The underlying reason for this is not so much the individual courage and ability of the officers and men, or even their skill in handling their ships and squadrons, as the fact that Great Britain has followed a definite naval policy; so that the British nation has had a perfectly clear realization of what it wishes the navy to do, and the navy has had a perfectly clear realization of how to do it.

The United States has not yet made a correct estimate of the naval situation; she has not yet reached the point that Great Britain reached ten years ago. Great Britain apprehended the danger, and took action before it was too late. Shall the United States take action now, or wait until it is too late?

Is it already too late?

BRADLEY A. FISKE.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE WITHOUT AMENDMENT

BY JOSEPH H. CHOATE, JR.

THE defeat, at the recent New York election, of the proposed constitution prepared by the Constitutional Convention of the State, raises a serious question as to whether any comprehensive reform of the frame of government under which we live can ever be secured. Nobody doubts that the present governmental mechanism of the State of New York is, in many respects, thoroughly bad; but to carry through a popular election any new plan in which the various necessary reforms are properly correlated is an undertaking of enormous difficulty. Whatever change may be proposed inevitably creates a body of enemies. Every measure that dispenses with useless services, or wasteful expenditure, and every step in reorganization which, by concentrating responsibility, lessens the power of any office-holder, strikes a severe blow at the personal interests of the man whose services are dispensed with, or whose power is diminished. The greater the reform, the greater is the number of such individuals affected. The man whose power or pocket is hit is usually a politician, well versed in the means of influencing public opinion. He rushes to the attack with an efficiency quite beyond that which can be expected, in opposition, from defenders of the measure, who are mostly moved by public interest alone. Any new constitution, therefore, which differs in more than a few points from that which it is to replace, is instantly opposed by a formidable array of hostile groups. The better the constitution, the greater the number of bitterness of its enemies. A perfect constitution, framed by an all-wise convention, and so devised as to do away with all waste, all graft, and all corrupt politics, would create so vast and varied an army of opponents that it would find difficulty in carrying a single election district.