



**Research Paper**

# Naval Power in the Rise of Great Powers: A Comparative Study Of Britain and China

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## I. Introduction

In the field of International relations, the term “power” is closely associated with the theory of realism. Throughout the ages, Realists have argued that power is the final arbiter in the relations among the separate nations. Power is the single most decisive determinant to any International arbitration. Ancient Thucydides’ dictum that the strong do what they want and the weak suffer the consequences is very much relevant as today as it was in Ancient days.

John Mearsheimer remarked, ‘calculations about power lie at the heart of how states think about the world around them’ (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The concept of power to different strands of realism, is different to each other. But overall, the Realists explain power in terms of Materialistic conception.

According to Waltz, The economic, military, and other capabilities of nations cannot be sectored and separately weighed. States are not placed in the top rank because they excel in one way or another. Their rank depends on how they score on all of the following items: size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence. (Waltz, 1979)

The Offensive realists John Mearsheimer state there are two kinds of state power: military power and latent power. The effective power of a state is calculated in terms of its military power, based on size and strength of the army. Mearsheimer defines “power largely in military terms because offensive realism states that force is the ultima ratio of international politics” (Mearsheimer, 2001)

He also explain different types of forces like sea power, air power, land power and nuclear weapons, contribute the overall military power of the state. But he maintained that, Land power is the dominant form of military power. There is a plethora of debate whether army or naval power or air power is most important for the state.

But here I respectfully disagree with the Mearsheimer and my proposition is that, Naval power is more important than land power to become a hegemon in International world order. Naval power can be used for power projection across the oceans. After 18<sup>th</sup> century, when trade shifts from land routes to sea routes, naval power become the most important variable to project power. Those who control the sea line of communication, control the ocean hence control the whole world. With a superior navy, state have command over the commons. hence the Rise of hegemon like Britain in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and US in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is due to their rise Naval power. In the modern world system, world powers have been sea (or ocean) powers, exercising command of the sea.

## The Concept of Sea Power

Sea power, is a kind of power in which a State which has the capability and capacity to use the sea/ocean for both civilian and Military purposes. It is directly related with the notion that military power deployed at the sea or from the sea becomes an inalienable part of State’s overall strength. The term “sea power” is was first coined by Alfred Mahan. Mahan’s works like “the influence of sea Power upon History, 1660-1783 and “the Influence of Sea power upon the French revolution and Empire, 1793-1812” becomes highly influential in both American and International circles. The concept of sea power is popularised in the 19th and 20th century in Naval academy across the world. Mahan books become a pamphlet for the Naval academy across the world.

The central argument of this “sea Power theory” is that, A great navy was very much required for National prosperity through military and economic expansion. Mahan believed “those who can control the sea

and sea lanes, can control the whole world". In other words, to become a world hegemon, a hegemon must focus on to control the sea and sea lanes by building a great navy, so that in a case of war or disputes, great power can deny access or choke the enemy supply lines at different ocean routes.

Mahan argued that Britain become a great because they control the sea lanes and have a very strong Royal Navy through which Britain had deny access to their enemy and control the choke points whenever they needed. He believed that these lessons could be applied to US foreign policy so that US can also control the sea lanes of the world's ocean and ultimately become a Great Power.

Mahan outlined the Six "Principal conditions affecting the sea power of Nations".

- Geographical position Mahan gave the example of Britain immunity from the rival land powers which gave her a unique position to control the Atlantic trade routes. Similarly, US is protected by oceans from both sides that is why US has much larger potential for maritime dominance by controlling the new trade routes.
- Physical conformation The second elements are physical conformation, or in other words the country's access to the oceans through rivers, lakes, harbours, and ports. It also include inland navigation river system, linking of canals etc.
- Extent of the Territory It means the physical layout of its coastline.
- Number of population It also depends on the size of the population of the country.
- National Character It depends on the sea surfing population and the character and attitudes of people regarding the commerce and trade through the sea.
- Character of the Government. Mahan argued that governmental attitudes and processes inevitably affect a nation's outlook on overseas commerce and concomitant naval strength. That is why, he tried to educate or aware the masses and legislator about the importance of ocean and sea power. He knew that sea power is an instrument for National power.

He also a gave a four-pillared foundation of Naval strategy :-

- Concentration The first principle talks about the concentration of force at critical point or choke points. He gave the examples of how Royal navy of Britain have concentrated force at various major critical trading routes like in the suez canal, in Africa and straits of Malacca etc.
- Objective Mahan wrote that a proper objective is an essential element of where to act. And the proper objective is to strike at the organized military force of the enemy.
- Offense Mahan's third great principle of strategy involved his concept of the offensive, a principle that state almost all statements of the maxims of warfare.
- Communications In the book, the problem of Asia, Mahan again says, Communications dominate war. Here communications refer to logistics for navy which was far from home.

We must also not forget to mention the non-naval elements given by Mahan. He asserted that more commercial ships, small boats, dwellers, gave an added advantaged in a case of war. they provided valuable insights, spy on enemy ships and provide logistics support to the navy. So their role must be appreciated.

Mahan insights on the sea power, importance of history and geography to the study and practice of international relations. His understanding regarding anarchical nature of International politics, the role of sea power in national security policy, and history's ability to shed light on contemporary world politics remains relevant to the 21st century world. Like Germany embraced Mahan doctrine of sea power, China also in the 21st century adopted the doctrine of Mahan. China is rapidly building and modernizing its Navy and try to turned into a Blue power. We can see the working of Mahan doctrine in International arena, when china started to build artificial Islands in South-china sea. China is also building military posts near the choke point area overseas. China is also working to surround India by string of pearls. We must revisit the writings of this great American strategist thinker to counter china and pursued Indian interests abroad.

Another genius sir Julian Corbett was British naval historian. He differed from Mahan in focusing on fleet battle. Corbett theory, could be summarized as either to secure the command of the sea or to the prevent the enemy from securing it. He explain the command of sea means control of maritime communications or sea lines of communication, SLOCS. So basically both Corbett and Mahan differ in the objective of Navy. Mahan theory that winning naval battles is the quick way to have a dominance on command of the sea. But Corbett theories explain, the main purpose of Naval Power is to protect the sea line of communication, witnessed in Russo-Japanese War, and World War II.

### ***Rise of Great Britain as Naval power***

England turned into the main maritime power in Europe, and along these lines the world, in the period 1688-1815. As so frequently with British military power in the period, it is important to know about prior improvements and to follow there the foundations of ability and achievement. The development of English maritime power in both the sixteenth and the seventeenth hundreds of years had prepared England with a

significant naval force and a custom of oceanic power that in this manner impacted political suspicions and perspectives about the important character and beneficial strategies of Britain as a tactical power. She had proactively been one of the main maritime powers, and had shown her solidarity during the Interregnum (1649-60), and, explicitly, in her capacity to challenge maritime authority with the Dutch, the premier maritime power, in the three AngloDutch battles of 1650-2, 1665-7 and 1672-4, despite the fact that there had been a relative decrease in English maritime power during the 1660s: because of French and Dutch shipbuilding, the English declined from prompting third most significant maritime power.

England was one of the first states to develop a relatively permanent Naval force. From the 16th century, Britain has started to focus on Naval fleets. The early start can be contributed to the necessities and opportunities of its geography and geo-politics. But England was very slow to have a large fleet due to constrained of financial resources. But British decision maker were able to overcome this for several hundred years.

Henry VII (1485-1509) started the practice of subsidizing the construction of larger vessels. They also built first dry dock at Portsmouth. But the first real expansion of Royal navy fleet was initiated by Henry VIII (1509-47). He is also credited for introducing the heavy guns on the ships, this development subsequently become an important of English naval strategy.

The Elizabethan era is also marked with frequent substantial maritime expansion primarily in private sector.

The English had a weak navy and little trade of their own to protect in 1560s. so they started to attack/plunder the Spanish ships. They emphasized a “guerre de course” strategy.

In the nineteenth century, the British navy assumed the duties of “collective good” like of suppressing piracy and the slave trade in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and the Mediterranean and China seas.

To carry these functions at Global role, the British Navy had built an extensive network of bases and dockyard like the base of Port Royal (Jamaica), Gibraltar, Halifax, and Port Mahon (Minorca) included Malta, Trincomalee, Falkland Islands, Aden, Hong Kong, Bermuda, Singapore, Lagos, Cyprus, Alexandria, Mombasa, Zanzibar, and Wei-Hai-Wei. Along with this, they also established a truly global base network around the world. At the mid of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, A naval station was designed for each of the sectors like North America, West Indies, West Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, the southeastern coast of South America, the Pacific, East Indies, China, and the Mediterranean, as well as the Home fleet. An Irish station was sometimes kept and, at later points, Australian and English Channel squadrons were also maintained.

Brits developed to cherish their naval force such a lot of that by the nineteenth century it was a most loved subject of books, music corridor tunes, workmanship, style and theater. From whenever Hawkins first arrived in Plymouth with a body brimming with Spanish gold, individuals of England shifted focus over to the west. When the Spanish Armada was crushed in 1588, as Englishmen watched the battling along the south coast, it was obvious to all that if England somehow managed to stay away from the destiny of little states across Europe and keep up with its autonomy, it should have been ready to safeguard the oceans around her coasts.

The naval force was especially well known on the grounds that it couldn't walk up Whitehall and hold onto control of the public authority. In seventeenth century England, the Stuart rulers and Cromwell all endeavored to check the freedoms of their subjects with the assistance of a military. The naval force could safeguard England, not pressure it.

By the eighteenth 100 years, the British celebrated as their naval force conveyed a large number of triumphs, and helpfully overlooked the odd loss. Hard circumstances, the steady presence of death and infection and years from home were forgotten as stories flowed of fortune ships and derring do. After Commodore Anson caught one Spanish boat he got back with more than 1,000,000 'bits of eight'; the normal sailors on his journey were compensated with the tremendous amount of 26 pounds each! With open doors like that, it was no big surprise that youngsters like James Cook, child of an inland ranch worker, looked for his fortune adrift.

As a result of Britain's technological lead, the navy enjoyed an increasing qualitative advantage over her enemies for nearly 200 years. After the decisive French defeat at the battle of the Saints in April 1782, the defeated admiral came on board the British flagship and admitted that the French navy was a “century behind” the British.

The nineteenth century had a place with Britannia, it was a long way from tranquil and the naval force were at the front of the battling. England's immense modern and monetary could converted into a naval force that was unchallengeable. Mostly due to this there was just a single huge European conflict in the period, the Crimean War, which saw British armadas took part in the Black and Baltic oceans. The maritime danger to the tsar's capital, St Petersburg, assisted with persuading the tsar to agree to united requests.

Outside Europe, however, there were endless other horrendous fights - from North Africa to China and Uruguay. In China, the naval force crushed the obsolete Imperial Chinese armada of trashes and progressed up the streams and trenches to force Britain's will on the Chinese sovereign. There were reformatory endeavors up the Congo to shell towns in which European merchants had been mistreated. There were activities against slave exchanging east and west Africa. Legislatures were upheld, brought down or constrained across South America by the use of maritime power.

In New Zealand, the local Maoris were overpowered by endeavors conveyed in the boats of the Royal Navy. Alexandria was assaulted to align the Egyptians with British vital objectives. Athens was barricaded until the Greek government paid pay to a British subject whose house was vandalized by a crowd. A youthful British maritime official stated: "You can't envision the impact of a British battleship... my attendance at Rome kept the city serene, however my boat was 50 miles off... English impact actually conveys the day, and a useful tidbit from us will do anything".

Up until recently never had one country been the world's cop, and it was upholding laws of its own concocting.

It was unavoidable that Britain, with her restricted populace and assets, couldn't keep on ruling the planet when the modernized economies of Russia, America and Germany turned their considerations to the ocean. Toward the start of the twentieth century a multi-polar maritime world, of the kind found in the seventeenth hundred years, returned. It was then essentially unreasonable for one country to hope to have most of the world's all out maritime boats, as Britain had done on occasion in the nineteenth 100 years.

Rather countries like Japan, Germany, America and France all constructed armadas similar with their modern turn of events and their desires as maritime powers. England's matchless quality consequently planted the seeds for its own obscurity, as different countries endeavored to imitate it.

### ***Rise of China as Naval power***

Since the reform of the Chinese economy, China has swiftly extended its marine commercial interests, sparking increased interest in maritime security and naval modernization. China's maritime-strategic modernization has accelerated in tandem with the country's fast economic growth over the last three decades, notably after the 1985 announcement of a new strategic focus on the country's maritime perimeter. Lately, China's expanding maritime power has enhanced the intensity with which it tries to influence its external environment, as well as its capacity to put its regional goals into action. It seeks to establish its place in Asia as the region's significant power and has also succeeded up to a great extent in this endeavor.

Surprised by the swift victory of America by using its high-tech technology in the Gulf war, the 1990s. China had embarked on a massive military modernization, including its Navy. The Naval expansion was done in three steps. First was the focus on coastal defense. It means defensive capability for the immediate Coastline. The second was to have a strong Navy to dominate areas up to the first Island chain. And third, it was to become a true blue water navy capable of projecting power beyond the second island chain. Currently, the PLAN is undergoing the third phase of its doctrine. PLAN is also developing anti-access and area denial capabilities. The PLAN comprises five branches; submarine force, surface force, coastal defense, marine corps, and the Naval Air force.

According to the U.S. (DOD), China has the largest Navy globally in numerical terms. In the last decade, the PLAN capability has increased many folds (DOD 2021). China has set a goal to become a world-class navy by the middle of the century. (Li and Wu, 2018). With the current induction of two aircraft carriers, Liaoning and Shandong, china's intention to become a sea power is quite clear.

China's 2019 defense white Paper advocates the need "to make a modern naval force to carry out missions overseas and protect Chinese overseas interest (White Paper 2021)." In other words, PLAN is growing its footprint globally and way to become a true blue water navy in the coming future.

The naval strategy of Mahan also appealed to Chinese Naval and political leaders. Mahan believed that "those who control the sea line of communications will control the world trade and hence, dominate the world." So any rising power that wants to protect their interests in the Sea must dominate the sea communications line. That is why PLAN has set the goal to become a truly Blue-water world-class navy by the middle of this century.

The recent aggressive move by China in the south china Sea has become a security concern to other countries. Countries like India, Australia, Japan, and Vietnam are also arming their Navy for defense against china. All East Asian countries have increased their defense budget in the last decades. Since China has territorial and maritime disputes with many countries, it has led to more skirmishes more frictions with the Navy of neighboring countries in recent times.

### **CONTINENTAL POWER TO SEA POWER**

Traditionally, China has been a continental power throughout the history. But since the 1990s, China has invested heavily in Naval capability.

Cole has given two reasons, economic interests and a desire to enforce its territorial claims through the extensive maritime regions along its borders is a strong motivation to build a strong navy (Cole 2002).

China has disputed territorial claims in Senkaku Islands, Taiwan, Parcel islands Spratly Islands, South China Sea, and its maritime border with Vietnam. No doubt, Taiwan is the most significant problem for china.

To enforce its claims on the south china sea and disputed Islands, China has relied on its PLAN.

Other major reason is better protection of economic interests. Economic interest and naval capability go hand in hand (Mahan). The major shipping lanes, extensive fisheries, energy sources in the South China seas have prompted China to build a strong Navy to exploit these resources.

I would like to add a third dimension to understand what is the ultimate purpose of China's Navy. Over the last few years, China has been increasing its footprint globally. China has got a military base in Djibouti to ensure its energy supplies from the middle east. The PLAN is also doing a number of high seas operations in Kenya and other African countries.

China's carrier strategy will simply clear our answer to the question's of its Navy's ultimate purpose. With five carriers and overseas command, china would see itself not as a regional player but as a global player who has the capability to project its power in far high seas. (Dallasnews, 2018)

## **CHINA NAVAL DOCTRINE**

*Li, Nan (2009). "The evolution of China's naval strategy and capabilities: from 'near coast.' and 'near seas' to 'far seas.'" Asian Security 5, 2: 144–69.*

Li has shown that China's naval strategy has undergone two major changes (Li 2009). The first one is from "near-coast defense" prior to the mid-1980s. The second changes to "near-seas active defense" after the mid-1980s., and then right now to the advancement of a "far-seas operations strategy ."The evolution of the Naval strategy of PLAN is the change in naval capabilities: from limited capabilities for the coastal defense to more expansive capabilities to operate more effectively in China's near Sea by the late 2000s. The latest new strategy of "far-seas operations" started in the mid-2000s may have major implications for the future development of china's naval capabilities. The recent acquisitions of overseas Military naval bases confirm the far seas strategy of china.

### **Near-coast Defense strategy**

the near-coast defense strategy refers to the defense of a dozen nautical miles that extended from china's Coastline and the land territory of about the 300 kilometers that stretch inland from the Coastline. It is the region where China is politically and economically important cities are located. Since China has an 18000km long Coastline, therefore they focus on important straits and strategic waterways. These include the Strait of Bohai, which is maritime to Beijing and the start of Taiwan, and the strait of Qiongzhou. The deployment of three PLAN fleets, like the North sea fleet, east sea Fleet, and South Sea fleet, correlates with the defense of these three straits.

### **Near-Seas active defense**

The near-coast defense strategy was left, and a new strategy was adopted after the mid-1980S. This new concept of near-seas active defense was first proposed by Deng Xiaoping. It was further advocated by Liu Huaqing in his doctrine of "defend actively, operate in the near seas."

This new strategy of PLAN covers much larger sea areas and requires significant substantial Naval capabilities. In this strategy, PLAN has given more autonomy means they are regarded as a "strategic service," which is independent and has its own geographical bounds of operations, a departure from the previous doctrine of near-coast defense strategy, which placed PLAN as a supportive service.

The operations seas area under this doctrine are

- the first island chain stretches from Kurile islands through the islands of Japan, Ryuku Archipelago, Taiwan, the Philippines to Borneo Island;
  - the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea, and the South China Sea, or three near seas within the inner rims of the first island chain,
  - and sea areas adjacent to the outer rims of this island chain, and those of north-pacific
- this concept does not cover the south pacific and the Indian ocean. Here the defined "near seas" is larger than the traditional 200 nm from china's Coastline.

This near-seas defense has the objective of the reunification of Taiwan, restoring past lost, disputed territories, protecting China's maritime resources, securing SLOC, deterring and defending against foreign aggression from the Sea, and conducting strategic nuclear deterrence.

#### Far-seas Operations

This doctrine was started in the late 1990s. Far-seas operations had become the strategic guide for China's naval modernization.

In the late 1990s, china's third-generation leader Jiang Zemin stated that while continuing to implement the near-seas active defense strategy, the PLAN should "in the long run pay attention to enhance far-seas defense and operations capabilities. After Hu Jintao came to power in 2002, he also stressed the need for a gradual transition to far-sea defense, enhancing the far seas operations capabilities.

The operation seas areas under this doctrine are

"all the sea areas beyond the 'near seas' are 'middle and far sea' and the sea areas adjacent to the inner and outer rims of the second island-chain and the maritime space beyond this chain can be understood as 'far-seas'." This definition covers a vast area encompassing from the northwest Pacific to the East Indian Ocean. In other words, this doctrine advocates for projecting naval operations capability beyond the 1000 nm from its territorial water.

Kondapalli discussed the PLAN structure, ships, and armaments (Kondapalli 2001). He also mentioned the near and long-term strategic intentions of China's Navy. He argued that the higher naval capabilities of China would certainly, affect neighbors of China like India.

By examining the near and long-term naval strategy of PLAN, Kondapalli believes there are significant changes from the earlier coastal defense strategy. He concludes that the naval strategy has recently evolved from coastal defense and shore denial to a more general policy of "sea denial," and the growth of the PLAN inventory will "make china to go for high seas between the second and third decades." China's decision to move toward a "blue-water navy" is generally credited to the PLAN commander. Liu Huaqing who "is inspired by the Alfred Thayer Mahan for his emphasis on sea power."

As such, the PLAN does not have one specific naval doctrine. Li Nan discusses three types of the maritime strategy in china. But security analysts conclude that china has an anti-access area denial strategy up to the first islands chain so that they can deter the U.S. in case of an invasion of Taiwan. China is currently focusing on regional water, not globally. Since the U.S. has 11 aircraft carriers and better logistics. So the U.S. still has more extensive, better capability, and more strength than china's Navy.

China only wants to dominate in the regional Sea as of now. It can give a serious challenge to U.S. freedom of navigation in south china seas and east Asia seas. But in the course of time, with a better economy, china is heading towards gaining the blue-water capability.

#### **CHINA'S NAVAL MODERNIZATION**

According to U.S. congressional research service 2021, "China's military modernization effort, including its naval modernization effort, is assessed as being aimed at developing capabilities for addressing the situation with Taiwan militarily if need be; for achieving a greater degree of control or domination over China's near-seas region, particularly the South China Sea; for enforcing China's view that it has the right to regulate foreign military activities in its 200-mile maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ); for defending China's commercial sea lines of communication (SLOCs), particularly those linking China to the Persian Gulf; for displacing U.S. influence in the Western Pacific; and for asserting China's status as the leading regional power and major world power (CRS 2021).

China's 2019 defense white paper also outlined the need "to build a strong and modernized naval force" that is capable of carrying out "missions on the far sea" by the mid of this century.

From the last two decades, China has been rapidly expanded its Navy. As of 2019, the Chinese Navy consisted of 335 ships, making it larger than the 296 vessels comprising the deployable battle force of the U.S. navy. China is producing New ships at an exponential rate. Between 2014 and 2018, China has launched more submarines, warships, amphibious vessels, and other ships than the number of ships currently serving in the navies of Germany, India, Spain, and the U.K.

According to the Department of Defense (DOD), a major focus of the PLAN modernization is upgrading and "augmenting its littoral warfare capabilities, especially in the South China Sea and East China sea." They have been focused on advancing its blue-water capabilities. (DOD 2021).

Expanding shipbuilding capability, there are six shipyards spread across china that fulfill naval shipbuilding. Each of these shipyards also contains facilities for producing commercial vessels.

According to IISS, under the Type-055 program, China is launching a new type of cruiser. The type-055 has an active electronically scanned array air search radar (IISS 2018)

China's naval modernization covers all areas of the fleet, and the speed and scale are impressive. The type-055 and China's aircraft carriers are even more significant in that these are not replacing existing vessels but adding significant new capabilities. The type-001 Liaoning and type-002 Shandong aircraft carrier provide PLAN with a more lethal capability to project its naval sea power across the high seas.

According to the DoD 2021, the modernization and expansion of these shipyards have "increased China's shipbuilding capacity and capability for all types of military projects, including submarines, surface combatants, naval aviation, and sealift assets."

China's naval modernization effort also has other elements like Anti-ship Missiles, Submarines, Aircraft Carriers, Surface combatants, Amphibious ships, Operations away from home waters.  
Similarities