Two Hundred Years of Anglo-American Relations, 1782-2012

— A case study in the peaceful transfer of power

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While the history of Anglo-American relations between 1782 and 2012 can be read in Churchillian terms as the growth of a shared identity, based on the English language, law, democracy and enterprise, a story in which the sheer scale of the new Republic resulted in an inevitable, peaceful transfer of leadership from the tiny island kingdom on the margins of Europe to a far mightier state across the Atlantic, a process speeded up by the immense cost of waging two global wars against Germany, such rosy hindsight would seriously misrepresents the underlying cultural differences between the two states, and the divergent character and ambition that has driven their world views.

In reality it is essential to recognise that these two counties were and remain profoundly different. At the heart of that difference lies the nature of sea power. While sea power is commonly used to describe strategic and policy choices, which are open to any state with a coast, money and manpower, this paper defines sea power as a question of total national engagement with the sea, of the sort reserved for states that are inherently, and even existentially, vulnerable to the loss of control over the sea lanes of

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communication. In this sense what passes for sea power is little more than a recognition of profound weakness.[1]

Sea power has been developed into the basis of great power status by a relatively small number of states, states that lacked the scale and manpower to be conventional continental great powers. The list of sea powers to reach this great power status in their own era is short, and specific: Athens, Carthage, Venice, Portugal, Holland and Britain. These states were all relatively weak, absolutely dependant on seaborne commerce for economic prosperity and much of their food supply. The loss of sea control would leave them exposed to utter ruin. These weak states only became sea powers to maximise their relative advantage because they could not become great land powers: England consciously turned to the sea because she failed to conquer France. This was a negative choice, based on demonstrated weakness. It worked for so long as larger states were unable or unwilling to create navies large enough to defeat the Royal Navy. Athens, the first great sea power, was utterly destroyed when the Spartans captured their fleet at the battle of Aegospotami, securing control of the main sea lane that carried grain to Athens, and then blockaded the city. It was to avoid a similar fate that Britain fought against first France and then Germany. The key to sea power strategy was to avoid total wars, build alliances against dominant continental powers, and use every means to prevent the construction of a hegemonic or universal state.

Sea power empires are different to continental empires, sea powers control trade routes: they occupy ports and naval bases, the nodal points of sea power strategy; critically they avoid over extension on land. In some regions of the world the key points of successive sea power empires overlap — successive empires use the same critical points as bases. For example, Corfu was a naval base for Athens, Venice and Britain. Cape Town, the key to European trade with Asia, was first located by the Portuguese, developed by the Dutch and finally taken by the British. While sea powers have secured land empires, such as the British in India, this has usually been accidental, and is always anomalous. It leads to cultural confusion, the misapplication of resources and usually ends in disaster.

Critically, true sea powers possess advanced democratic political systems, by contemporary standards. This form of political inclusion provides the key to mobilising the resources of the commercial and mercantile classes to fund the long-term maintenance of a costly navy. The last point is the key test of a true sea power. Creating navies for war is easy; sustaining them in peace is not. The driver for long-term naval power is secure communications, not strategic power. Only by sharing political power with merchants can the political elite hope to access their funds, and only when they have a share in direction of navies will merchants be willing partners of the state in maintaining navies. True sea power navies prioritise the defence of trade, not the projection of power. Navies that are not connected to merchant shipping and trade, purely "military" navies, inevitably fail in the medium or long term. The various navies of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union provide the best example of systemic failure on the largest scale. Russia, however defined, is a great continental state, and has no need for sea power beyond the watery margins; the Russian/Soviet state has never shared political power with commercial interests, and in consequence has never possessed a first-class navy. Russian attempts to sustain such a fleet provide the only truly circular recurrent pattern in world history.

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Sea powers have naval heroes, and naval culture. Maritime words are well represented in their languages, their ceremonies and their art. British English contains a far greater number of maritime terms than American English. In Britain the Royal Navy is the "Senior Service," Trafalgar Square is the centre of the London, Lord Nelson is the national hero and the first response of the British to a crisis is to look to the Navy. It was no accident that in 1982 Britain mobilised the entire Navy, but only relatively few soldiers for the Falklands War.

Sea powers are engaged with the wider world, they seek to understand countries beyond their borders, and promote

connections. They fight for trade and vital interests, not territory. In 1982 it was the rights of the Falkland Islanders that drove British policy, not the possession of a few extra miles of windswept sheep fold. The greatest enemies of sea powers are hegemonic states seeking a revival of the Roman Universal Empire, the Empire that crushed Carthage. Under Louis XIV and Napoleon France tried to dominate Europe, Britain worked with allies, using sea power, money and a small army to block that ambition. French philosopher Montesquieu was deeply troubled by the failure of history to repeat itself, seeing British success as a reversal of past precedent. He referred to the British as the new Carthaginians, and spent his intellectual life explaining their success to his countrymen.[2] Napoleon was only the most famous of many French statesmen to follow Montesquieu, and while he used the term "Carthaginian" as a term of abuse. After 1890 these French insults were repeated by anglophobes in Imperial Germany, who reprinted many of the more extreme French attacks on Britain as a commercially driven "Carthaginian" sea power state.[3] Far from resenting the insult the British were quick to adopt it as a badge of honour. Just as Carthage, a classic sea power state, had resisted the hegemonic ambitions of Rome, Britain had defied the ambitions of Napoleonic France, only this time, as in Montesquieu's day, the new Carthaginians had won. To celebrate this linkage J. M. W. Turner, the greatest artist of British identity, painted a series of Carthaginian pictures to celebrate Britain's contribution to the final defeat of the Napoleonic empire. Britain could only function as a global power in the absence of a hegemonic European state, a reality that made defeating potential continental states a basic requirement of British security and economic policy for four hundred years. The "Carthaginian" label was entirely appropriate.

As a sea power Britain did not seek territorial aggrandisement. At the end of the 22-year-long cycle of Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars that ended at Waterloo they employed their power and influence to help create a stable, peaceful, balanced European state system, to prevent a renewed hegemonic thrust by France, or Russia, and open the continent for British commerce. The only territories they took were small offshore islands, Malta, Corfu,

Heligoland and Mauritius, the latter, linked to Cape Town, gave them control of all trade passing between Europe and Asia. They had no desire to extend their occupation into the interior of Africa. Instead they compelled the Algerians to end the enslavement of European sailors. In the nineteenth century the British used skill, money and power to create the first globalised economy. They knocked down trade barriers, by force or by finance, pioneered new forms of capital movement, invented and laid the first global communications network, the submarine telegraph cable, and used it to build new markets. The modern world economy is a British construction, because Britain needed global trade to prosper. It should come as no surprise that a British innovator created the world-wide-web.

Maritime states favour agile, flexible, limited defence. This is reflection of their underlying weakness in population and resource terms. As a result they favour limited wars over total wars, and tend to be clear-sighted when they do resort to war. This clarity of thought, emphasis on the national interest and determination to employ the "British Way in Warfare" has been confused by the need to operate with allies with very different, continental, strategic ideas. In the Napoleonic conflict Britain resisted the lure of large-scale continental military operations, relying on economic warfare, peripheral operations and extensive economic support to her allies. In the twentieth century the British state was bankrupted and broken by the human and economic costs of waging two total wars as part of continental grand alliances. Today Britain operates as a medium power within major alliances, which are dominated by continental perspectives. As a result British politicians have lost sight of the national interest, following the United States into two futile conflicts, the most recent in Afghanistan, a country where British national interests are remarkable only by their absence.

The United States, despite its British heritage, has been a continental state for more than 200 years, with a defence structure dominated by the army and air force. America found its intellectual and cultural models first in France and then, after 1871, in Imperial Germany. This link should be obvious from the methods and training of the U.S. Army, the structure of American Universities,

and nature of American industry. The American way of war is essentially a more professional, and more resource heavy version of the German model, firepower, superior technology, big logistics, detailed planning and "decisive" battle. America is self-sufficient in food, fuel and 99% of raw materials. As the world's largest internal market, intimately connected to the resources and markets of Canada and Mexico, it has no obvious need for external trade. The sea is peripheral.

The United States is not a sea power, and has not been one for at least 200 years.[4] In 1794 the United States created a navy for the classic sea power mission of protecting national shipping against pirates. While this mission remained significant for the next fifty years America lowly lost sight of the sea. In 1803 President Jefferson acquired a vast trace of North America from Napoleon, the "Louisiana Purchase" at a stroke transforming the new nation from a maritime trading state based around a series of prosperous Atlantic port cities into a continental power with aspirations to reach the Pacific. Over the next seventy years America became a continental state with habit of attacking its neighbours and taking their land. Modern America is another Roman Empire, a vast self-sufficient, continental power with astonishing resources of manpower, money and industry. It managed very well with minimal naval power for nearly half its existence, and came close to abolishing the fleet more than once.[5] Today while America possesses a vast military navy it thinks and acts like a classic land power. Britain does not.

This philosophical distinction is critical to any attempt to understand how relations between the two powers have evolved over the past two hundred years, years which have seen Britain accept the inevitability of relative decline, and shift the burden of strategic sea power to America. The transfer of power was remarkably easy, because the two powers had managed to work out their differences before America became a Great Power in the early twentieth century. This transfer occurred midway through a century dominated by three global conflicts, the two World Wars and the Cold War. In all three conflicts the vital interests of Britain and America aligned; both saw Germany and then the Soviet Union as existential threats

to their survival, their way of life and their commercial interests. These threats were continental, not maritime. In large-scale conflicts against potential hegemonic powers Britain has always looked for continental alliance partners to carry the military burden. Here the United States was only the last in a long line of such allies.

From the first establishment of the United States British statesmen were concerned that it had the potential to become a rival sea power state. America had many ports, ships and sailors, it was a rich trading nation, one where the first millionaires were merchants trading with China. During the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Empire (1793-1815) Americans made a fortune supplying shipping services and goods to France and her empire. But the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 shifted their focus westward into the continent, and by 1812 ships and the sea were a minor issue as American attacked what is now Canada, seeking to conquer the province and incorporate it into the United States. They also struck at Spanish owned Florida. Both attacks failed. Canadians decided to be Canadian. Unable to win on land America mobilised her commercial shipping to serve as privateers, the classic strategic choice of weak naval powers. Britain made a decisive response to the challenge, using convoys, patrols, blockades and coastal offensives to annihilate the raiders. They also promoted slave resistance in the Southern States. After the downfall of Napoleon they captured and burned Washington DC, to teach the Americans that sea power was a terrible weapon in the hands of skilled men. American-born British naval officer Captain Edward Brenton, who served with distinction in the War of 1812, concluded the post-war strategic balance strongly favoured Britain.

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> Great Britain has it in her power, while she commands the seas, to convulse the continent of America, and by exciting and assisting her discontented subjects. Had twenty thousand men been sent from England, as was originally intended, the rising of the slaves in Virginia would have been most probably fatal to the Southern States of America.

He reminded the Americans that they had achieved none of their war aims.[6] Brenton's book was widely circulated among British naval officers and statesmen. While the war ended with a *status quo ante* peace, fear of British naval power dominated American strategic thinking for the next ninety years. The Americans spent their money on coast defences! Despite the effort and expense they acknowledged their weakness in the face of a superior navy.[7] Their next aggressive land grab wrenched a large section of the continent, stretching from Arizona to California, from Mexico in 1846-48. Little wonder Latin and South American states began to fear their aggressive neighbours.[8]

British Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister Lord Palmerston recognised America's latent power and expansive aims. He had been in Government during the War of 1812, and recognised the danger posed by American populist politics and election slogans like "Manifest Destiny." He spent much of his career carefully watching the American expansionism, combating the importation of African slaves, and blocking attempts to filibuster the vital offshore island naval base of Cuba from Spanish rule. Britain and America kept the peace because the Americans feared British sea power, and the British had no desire to acquire any more continental territory. This was a classic sea power versus land power stand off. Between 1815 and 1861 Britain and America had many disputes, but:

> the statesmen on both sides always managed to avoid war. The issues were never so serious that good sense, clear diplomatic signalling and timely concession could not avert a conflict that would have profited neither side. Having secured Canada and kept the Spanish in Cuba, Britain was unlikely to fight over the remaining points, not because she could not, but because to do so would weaken her ability to support more significant interests in Europe.[9]

While America still used naval power for diplomacy and the promotion of trade, most famously in 1852 when Commodore Perry "opened" Japan, such activities occurred in a world dominated by the Royal Navy.[10]

During the American Civil War 1861-65 the Federal Government came close to war with Britain. An American warship illegally

seized passengers from a British mail steamer on the high seas. The *Trent* Crisis ended when the British mobilised a fleet to attack New York, the Americans promptly gave way. This was typical of Anglo-American relations in the period, the British usually conceded minor points, but were quick to sustain their vital interests; Canada, Cuba and international law. Prime Minister Palmerston reflected that this was a golden opportunity to take a studied revenge for years of American insults.

> If the Federal Government comply with the demands it will be honourable for England and humiliating for the United States. If the Federal Government refuse compliance Great Britain is in a better state than at any former time to inflict a severe blow upon and to read a lesson to the United States which will not soon be forgotten.[11]

He had no doubt Britain would be successful: "I feel at my ease as to all our points of attack and defence except Canada," but "we shall have a great advantage by sea, and we must make the most of it."[12] Palmerston made excellent use of the major London newspapers to convey his deterrent message. At *The Times*, the most important British daily newspaper, widely considered semi-official, editor John Thaddeus Delane repaid the Premier's confidence with a sustained attack on the Americans. Delane reflected a national desire to have revenge for "the foul and incessant abuse of Americans, statesmen, orators and press." With the nation, the Army, the Navy and the Militia all enthusiastic, he hoped that if it came to war the Americans would receive such a beating "that even Everett, Bancroft and Co. won't be able to coin victories out of them."[13]

After 1865 British observers recognised a fundamental change in American power, the scale of military and industrial mobilisation indicated a shift to Continental status. The rapid run-down and almost complete evisceration of the Navy was even more significant. The United States was focused on closing the internal frontier, harnessing internal resources and developing industrial power on a continental scale. Little wonder Americans looked to Germany as the model for its development. The United States Navy slipped out of sight, a moribund collection of obsolete wooden gunboats that attempted to uphold American interests. The limits of American

influence were clear; Washington had no answer to local powers like Chile with more powerful fleets.[14]

While British statesmen grappled with the political consequences of the new form and scale of American power, notably in the dispute over the *Alabama* claims, they began to trace longer patterns and think about the future. English historians had been using the concept of sea power in a recognisably modern form since the 1840s, alongside the study of relevant precursor states like Venice as key tools for analysing the British problem of avoiding an imperial "fall" of the type so eloquently addressed by Edward Gibbon[15]. John Robert Seeley, Regius Professor of History at Cambridge (1869-1895), belonged to a generation that looked back to the glorious beginning of the British Empire in the age of Drake and Raleigh, and stressed the connection with the contemporary situation. Sea power was an obvious theme, linked to his belief that modern history was a superior base for education, glorying in its present and future utility. Not only did Seeley declare that "history is the school of statesmanship," but he applied a forensic quality to the problem, sweeping away "the purely popular, romantic and fantastic views of the subject which prevail and bring out clearly the exact questions which need to be investigated."[16] As one might expect from a Victorian imperialist who conceived history as a social science Seeley made a significant contribution to sea power theory. In an aside ignored by historians and strategists alike he stressed that the emergence of Atlantic trade had affected Holland and Britain much as that of the Mediterranean had invigorated the intellects of Greece and Rome. Furthermore Britain's advantage over France as an Imperial power lay in her single-minded pursuit of seapower, exploiting her geographic good fortune to avoid costly European commitments. Britain was an oceanic power, not a land or mixed power. Inevitably Seeley deployed this insight for a contemporary audience. In *The*

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Expansion of England of 1883 he argued that the modern world contained two great land powers, Russia and America: "enormous political aggregations" which had been created by:

> modern inventions which diminish the difficulties created by time and space. Both are continuous land powers. Between them, equally vast, but not as continuous, with the ocean flowing through it in every direction, lies, like a world-Venice, with the sea for streets, Greater Britain.

He knew that sea power had important political and cultural consequences, but they were frequently fleeting. For all their brilliance the achievements of Athens and Venice ended when larger states arose to suppress their liberty. Seeley argued for a larger British state to match the emerging superpowers. His message that a Greater Britain based on oceanic power was the only safeguard for the future was widely consumed. While he warned that a serious commitment to Europe would constitute a critical danger to the Empire, this remained a dim menace in an age when the danger of a French invasion had but recently receded. If he could not foresee the political patterns of 1914 he had the prescience to note: "sooner or later we must lose India because sooner or later some war in Europe will force us to withdraw our English troops".[17]

At heart Seeley's two key texts *The Expansion of England* and the posthumous *Growth of British Policy* were extended investigations of the rise and fall of nations, with the explicit purpose of avoiding a "Fall". Little wonder *Expansion* sold over 80,000 copies in two years, and secured him a constellation of admirers among politicians, journalists and empire builders, from Lord Roseberry, Joseph Chamberlain and W. T. Stead to Alfred Milner and Cecil Rhodes.[18] Seeley's multi-disciplinary approach foreshadowed modern "War Studies". He used sea power sparingly, subtly and with powerful effect. Many of those Britons who were so struck by Mahan were predisposed to the message by Seeley.

Seeley's message inspired the move towards a "Greater Britain" the concept of a closer political and economic linkage between the various dominions, colonies and dependencies of the Empire, to forge a Roman-style imperium on a chaotic scatter of islands, ports and hinterlands that stretched across the globe. This was at

once impossible and irrelevant. Down to the mid-1870s nineteenth century British statesmen had seen Empire as a burden to be shared, and then shed, they would civilise, stabilise and democratise before handing on the costly task of government and defence to settlers, or locals. If the colonies of settlement were the first to be given self-government, the remaining lands were only waiting to reach the necessary political maturity. This was a wise decision. In the wars of the twentieth century the massive reinforcements willingly provided by Canada, Australia and New Zealand transformed the strategic power of the British state. The nations shared values and heritage, they did not need to be compelled or coerced into providing support. Seeley's concept of closer political unity was unworkable, maritime empires have always operated looser federal structures than land empires; America was a spin-off from the British sea empire, just as Carthage was a spin-off from the Phoenician empire. In both cases the transfer of political power to mercantile local authorities created a desire for autonomy in key issues like taxes and restrictions on trade, and created a class of lawyers and merchants with the skills necessary to run cities and provinces. Attempts to impose Roman-style central control on the diffuse commercially minded British Empire prompted revolts and, in the case of America, created a new state. After 1782 the British were well aware of the problem, and avoided antagonising local sensibilities as far as possible. After a century the lesson began to fade, but the underlying ideas remained. Britain was a new Carthage, not a new Rome. It lacked the manpower, resources and continuous land mass to be a Roman Empire. The British were happy to use the cultural language of Roman Imperial might to sustain their self-image, notably with Nelson's Column, but their real concern was to prevent the emergence of a new universal monarchy on Romans lines.

Even the exponents of a minimalist British Empire recognised there were some things that had to remain under central control. Sea power and sea control were and are indivisible, they need to be controlled from the centre, and run in a consistent manner. As a result the British recognised that a few key points must remain imperial. Admiral Sir John Fisher identified these as the "strategic keys" that "locked up the world". They included Bermuda,

Halifax, Gibraltar, Malta, Aden, Cape Town, Singapore and Hong Kong. Suitably fortified, with excellent communications links, dry docks and naval base facilities they enabled a sea empire to function effectively around land empires — without the need for conflict unless the land empires challenged British access to global markets, or sea lanes. Only then would the British fight.

Attempts to create a more cohesive empire, based on imperial tariff preference and closer political union were a non-starter because the British economy was fundamentally a capitalist economy, using the income from massive overseas investments outside the empire to fund imports, and the City of London dominated that economy. British manufacturing was only ever a second string in the national economy, so Joseph Chamberlain's Birmingham could never replace the City of London as the dominant economic interest. Britain and America occupied entirely separate spheres of power, they were developing in very different ways, and the vital interests they shared greatly outweighed those on which they differed. They had no reason to fight, but that did not mean they were not rivals for influence, commerce and control. It was to this end that the United States rebuilt its navy.

In the 1890s the Americans began to create a "Roman" navy, the militarised naval arm of a continental great power.[19] This fleet was built for battle and the projection of power, rather than the defence of sea lanes and control of trade.[20] Over the next fifty years the United States Navy would challenge the "Carthaginian" sea power Navy of Great Britain in size and fighting power, although it always assumed a distinctive "battle-heavy" shape. The United States navy never became a true sea power navy, because the sea had long ceased to be central to America and an economy, a state or a culture. By 1900 the British recognised America as the dominant regional power in Latin America. They reduced the scale of naval strength deployed to the West Indies, leaving the area to be policed by the Americans.

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This was a typical British response to regional strength. As long as the safety of shipping was secured they were happy to shift their forces to other areas. The Americans had secured control of the Caribbean in 1898, driving the Spanish out of Cuba. At the same time they took on an empire in Asia, occupying the Philippines. Here the Royal Navy made sure it would be America and not Germany that inherited the old Spanish Empire. Having annexed Hawaii America now stretched across the Pacific to Asia, and took an increasingly interventionist role in Asian politics, to the consternation of local powers, China and Japan. In effect Britain and America began to pool seapower; the British carried the main burden in Europe, covering America against potential challenges from Germany, France and Russia. In return America secured the Western Hemisphere and took an increasing role in Asia. As Alfred T. Mahan, the arch exponent of sea power theory argued, this was essential to American interests. Mahan persuaded a doubtful American government to reverse their ancient position on maritime belligerent rights. Having spent 120 years trying to weaken the impact of sea power on weaker states America, newly powerful at sea accepted the argument that sea power was essential to counter the rising land power of Imperial Germany. To do this effectively it needed the potent impact of economic warfare.[21]

The decisive moment in Anglo-American relations came in 1914, when the United States decided that it would back the British and French against Imperial Germany, despite the important intellectual and human links between the two countries, because German militarism was a greater threat to America than British sea power. Democracy and global trade were the key issues. In 1917 America joined the war against Germany, after the Germans tried to foment a war with Mexico, their troops helped bring the conflict to an end. BUT the American President had no intention of accepting British naval dominion. He ordered massive naval construction programmes in 1916 and 1918 in a blatant attempt to restrict the British exercise of belligerent rights at sea, the right to search neutral shipping and blockade hostile powers. The biggest ships in these programmes deliberately re-used the names of warships that had defeated Royal Navy ships, or American battle victories

on land between 1776 and 1814. These names were used for every single American aircraft carrier ordered before 1942. In effect the Americans were using naval power to leverage Britain, and because Britain was critically vulnerable to the loss of sea control, both as an island state, and a global empire. While the programmes were cut back in 1919 they were a key argument in the move for American naval parity. Relations between the two states were distinctly unfriendly, with a major "Naval Battle of Paris" souring relations at the Paris Peace Conference. In 1914 Britain had massive investments in America; by 1919 the economic balance had been reversed. America made a fortune by remaining neutral, and now Britain had massive debts to America for war materials and loans that it raised in New York to support Russia and France.

The possibility of a major naval arms race, which would also involve Japan, was avoided by the Washington Treaty of 1922. The result was to fix world naval power at levels that suited the Americans, rather than the British. That these were low levels reflected the reluctance of Congress to provide funds. America neither needed nor wanted a global sea control navy, but it did not want Britain to have one either. By cutting the scale of British naval strength the Washington process greatly reduced the strategic weight and diplomatic impact of sea power in world politics. This weakness was obvious to the British, and at the follow-on limitation conferences held in Geneva and London in 1927 and 1930 they argued that they needed more cruisers to defend their global trade connections. The Americans brushed the argument aside, because they had no such need, and no desire to spend more money on ships to defend non-existent trade links. For America a "Navy Second to None" was both a political mantra for domestic consumption, and a vital diplomatic tool to leverage Britain. In the late 1930s America began to build up the Navy, but re-armament was part of the "New Deal" economic package to reduce domestic unemployment.

While the two countries avoided open conflict in this period, their divisions, largely a reflection of profound differences of culture, interest and perception, gravely weakened the democracies as the Fascist states began to attack their neighbours. The United

States only acknowledged the depth of the problem after the Fall of France in June 1940. In response America began lending Britain money, munitions and machinery to carry on the war. They only joined the conflict in December 1941 AFTER the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Throughout this period ideological concerns about British imperialism blinded the Americans to far graver threats. Even in 1945 President Roosevelt failed to grasp the strategic threat posed by Soviet Russia. By then the United States Navy had outgrown the Royal Navy, winning the Pacific Naval War single handed. Yet the naval victory was a limited victory, and in both theatres of war the Americans moved to complete their victory by deploying overwhelming military power. When the Romans fought Carthage victory at sea was only a precursor to the decisive military strike, taking Carthage and imposing peace on a prostrate enemy. In Europe a vast American Army landed and drove the Germans to utter defeat. In Asia a similarly massive invasion was planned for Japan, only to be overtaken by new methods of waging war. The United States Army Air Force tried to defeat Japan by strategic bombardment and in the atom bomb found a weapon that could turn militarised aviation into a knock-out weapon. What Rome achieved with a massive army and a siege in the third and last Punic War the Americans achieved with atomic bombs. The ongoing debate about whether these weapons were "necessary" to victory exposes a fundamental strategic dichotomy between military concepts of "decisive" war and seapower concepts of "limited" war. It did not matter that a naval blockade might, or might not have brought Japan to surrender, it mattered that America won by a knock-out, and this meant using land-based power.

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This underlying reality became obvious once the war ended. As America demobilised it transformed the Army Air Force into a free-standing service, dominated by the concept of strategic

bombardment with nuclear weapons. In 1947 the new Air Force joined the Army, its parent organisation, in an attempt to wipe out the United States Navy as a major fighting force. The Air Force would take over all aviation, while the Army stripped out the Marine Corps.[22] Without a potential rival at sea the "Roman" Universal Empire of America did not have a strategic concept that could justify the maintenance of a vast fleet. The defence of sea lanes and trade simply did not count. The anti-naval programme, pushed through by the new Department of Defense was well on the way to success by 1950. Only the outbreak of the Korean War saved the Navy and the Marine Corps. The Cold War gave the Americans an enemy to prepare against, in this case the emerging fleet of the Soviet Union, and they responded with an unprecedented peace-time naval build-up. Since 1950 America has been the undisputed master of the oceans, with more naval power than all other world navies combined. Like the Roman and other military navies the modern United States Navy emphasises Marines in their order of battle, seeking to project power from the sea, to fight on shore.

While the British tried to maintain their sea power after 1945 the attempt was forlorn, Britain was absolutely bankrupt and rapidly losing control of the imperial system that had sustained and justified the oceanic navy. They accepted the new reality that America would be the dominant naval power because they lacked the money to compete, and because America, rather than threatening their survival, was taking up the key role of securing the sea lanes for the safe conduct of trade, the main reason why the British had a navy. The British used their last remaining credit and resource to draw the Americans into a binding commitment to defend Western Europe against the looming Soviet threat, setting up NATO in 1948 so that the trident of sea power passed, if only nominally, to a Western democratic consortium, rather than a single state.

That process was by no means smooth or consistent. In 1956 the Americans blocked an Anglo-French attempt to recover control of the Suez Canal, which they owned, thereby unleashing the spectre of Middle Eastern nationalism, increasing the risk and cost of oil supplies, and setting the course for the violent, unstable politics that have dominated the region ever since. The sheer hypocrisy of

this conduct from the country that created Panama so they could build the other great Canal has rarely troubled American analysts. The strategic impact on Western seapower of losing control of this arterial waterway is hard to calculate. The tragedy of 1956 ended any lingering illusion that Britain might retain a fragment of the global power that it has exercised only twenty years before. It left true sea power to a collective, led by the wholly continental mindset of the United States.

Despite Suez Britain found a significant place in the American-led Western consortium because the two powers agreed that the Soviet Union was the greatest threat to their interests. Britain became a key asset provider; the Royal Navy like the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force, focused on the classic sea power missions of trade defence and oceanic security, conveniently leaving the United States Navy free to focus on naval battle and power projection, the "military" missions of a continental navy. It is no accident that the American fleet is represented by carrier aviation, marine expeditionary forces and ballistic missile submarines, the British and Japanese by escort vessels, destroyers and frigates.

While Athens, Carthage and Portugal were ultimately destroyed by great continental powers, Britain, like Venice and Holland, managed her decline with skill and caution. The transfer of naval hegemony from Britain to America was relatively painless because it was not a level transfer, the two states were so fundamentally different in all respects, especially strategic culture, that they did not pose existential threat to each other at any time after 1782. The British never attempted to recover their former colonies, and the Americans never attempted to conquer Britain. Britain abandoned her hegemony at sea to meet economic needs, and did so without a struggle because naval dominance was passing to a power that would use it in ways that were generally acceptable to them. With that the last Great Power state based on naval might

Britain and the U.S. were so fundamentally different in all respects, especially strategic culture, that they did not pose existential threat to each other at any time after 1782.

left the international stage, henceforth world power would belong to vast continent sized states, self-sufficient military states that looked to land and air power. The sea would occupy a marginal role in the strategy of the Cold War.

Sea power still mattered at the margins. In 1982 American support provided a critical edge for Britain in the Falklands Conflict. When so-called European "allies" refused to loan artillery rounds America stepped in, America also provided the latest air to air missiles, diplomatic cover and much more. In return the British agreed not to beat the Argentines too badly. In 1991 only the Royal Navy operated with the American Fleet at the fighting end of the First Gulf War, a sure sign of deep, long-term links and cross-training. The end of the Cold War shifted the global balance back towards the sea, with global trade booming, and resource dependency growing control of sea communications is as important today as it has ever been. Modern Britain enjoys most of the benefits of sea power without having to meet the cost of maintaining a suitably large Navy. But with the future direction of the American Navy once more in question that fortunate situation may not endure for as long as is commonly assumed. This may be why the British are building two big aircraft carriers.

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2 Rahe, P., *Montesquieu and the Logic of Liberty: War, Religion, Commerce, Climate, Terrain, Technology, Uneasiness of Mind, the Spirit of Political Vigilance, and the Foundations of the Modern Republic.* Yale Universtiy Press, New Haven, 2009, pp.3-61, esp. p. 59.

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6 E. P. Brenton, *The Naval History of Great Britain.* (Henry Colburn: London 1825), Vol. V, pp. 199-205 & Lambert, A. D., "Winning without Fighting: British Grand Strategy and its application to the United States, 1815-1865," in Lee, B. & Walling. K., eds. *Strategic Logic and Political Rationality: Essays in Honour of Michael J. Handel.* United States Naval War College, Newport Rhode Island, 2003, pp.164-95.

7 Lambert 2003, p.176.

8 Loveman, D., *No Higher Law: American Foreign Policy and the Western Hemisphere since 1776.* University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2010, pp.100-14.

9 Lambert, 2003, p.177.

10 Schroeder, J.H., *Shaping a Maritime Empire: The Commercial and Diplomatic Role of the American Navy, 1829-1861.* Greenwood Press, Westport Conn., 1985.

11 Palmerston to the Queen 5.12.1861: H C F Bell, *Lord Palmerston*. London, 1936, Vol. II. p.295.

12 Palmerston to Foreign Secretary Lord John Russell 5 & 6.12.1861 in Bell p. 295 and Russell Papers TNA PRO 30/22/21 f620.

13 John Thaddeus Delane to William Howard Russell 11.11.1861 *History of "The Times",* Vol. II: London (1939), p. 373. George Bancroft had been the American Ambassador in London in 1846-48, and was well known to Palmerston and Delane. He published books that promoted the myth of American victory in the War of 1812 which, by encouraging educated Americans to hold unrealistic opinions as to the outcome of another war, contributed to Anglo-American antagonism.

14 Loveman, pp.140-9.

15 Gibbon, E., *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* A book written around the American Revolutionary War with the explicit intention of offering up a model of Imperial decline that could be studied by contemporary British statesmen seeking to avoid a similar fate, one of the great works of history. See Porter, R. *Gibbon.*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1988 for origins and meaning of this monumental text.

16 Wormell, D., *Sir John Seeley and the Uses of History.* Cambridge, 1980, p.41-2. Seeley, J.R., *The Expansion of England.* London, 1883, pp.1.43, 90.

17 Seeley J., *The Expansion of England*, London, 1883, pp. 288, 291-2 & 300-1.

18 Wormell, pp. 129, 154-6, 179-80.

19 The Roman fleet was built to win battles, securing the seas so that Roman armies could be deployed to destroy rival states like Carthage, Macedonia and Selucia, it wiped out sea powers so that it could control the vial grain supplies of Sicily, Sardinia and Egypt. The United States used naval power in the same way, defeating the navies of rival states to secure the sea before projecting overwhelming military power, by invasion or air bombardment. The methods may have changed, but the underlying rationale has not.

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22 Barlow, G., *The Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945-1950*. United States Government, 1995.