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Gunboat Diplomacy in the political application of Sea Power by Commodore Jacob Børresen
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During the 200 years from 1804 to 2004 there was war somewhere in Europe, for in the order of 40 years. In other words, for 160 of those 200 years there was some sort of peace, or absence of war, in our part of the world. Peace, or absence of war, has thus been the normal state of affairs.

Introduction

Never the less, all major powers and the majority of the lesser nation states, regularly employed, and continue to employ, military power in order to reach some political goal or other, in order to further and protect own interests. But more often than not such employment of military power does not result in war. It is indeed specifically intended not to result in war unless absolutely necessary and is often employed for the express purpose of preventing war. Especially for minor powers like Norway that very seldom, if ever, have anything to gain from war; contributing to prevention of war is in fact the priority one task of the armed forces. Absence of war is thus not only the normal state of affairs; it is also the overarching goal. This means, that for the armed forces, the requirements of their peacetime tasks are more important as basis for their structure than the requirements of war. And the armed force of a state which priority one task is to avoid war looks different from a force whose principal task is to fight. The latter is typically the armed forces of the major power that by virtue of its global interests, it's capability for waging war at acceptable cost, and thus its inclination to actively pursue its interests by military means.

As Admiral Mahan has pointed out, it is politically very difficult for the small liberal democracy, to which war is anathema and goes against the grain of everything it believes in and identifies with, to uphold armed forces in times of peace, in competition with other worthy causes like healthcare, roads, police, pension funds, farm subsidies and what not. An absolute precondition if the armed forces of the small liberal democracy are to survive a prolonged period of peace is therefore that they are seen to meet some useful peacetime purpose. It also helps if the authorities can point to treaty- or moral obligations to contribute with forces to further peace and security abroad or to manage territory or resources on behalf of the international community. It is for instance my view that the maybe most important function of post cold war NATO to a country like Norway is that the obligations that flow from our membership in the alliance provides our government with arguments to support the defence budget. Thus, in order to preserve viable and worthwhile armed forces in peacetime as an insurance policy in case war threatens, it is vital that our forces be put to other peacetime use than just preparing for the next war. The good news is that armed forces in general, and naval forces in particular, contain capabilities that, used timely and correctly, are well suited to actively creating conditions that further and support the goal of peace and stability. But more than that, they can also – and again especially the navy – be used to actively pursue and protect national interests like protecting and upholding national sovereignty, exploitation of natural resources, the rule of the international law of the sea, the protection of environment. And last but not least, if used consciously and with purpose, through its deployment both nationally and abroad, the Navy can serve as a concrete and visible expression and symbol of state authority that signal and underline national interests and priorities.

This line of reasoning rests on a realist approach to international relations. It assumes that the principal actors in international affairs are the nation states, that national policies primarily – if not solely – is driven by the pursuit and protection of what nations perceive as their national interest and that the relationship between them are thus characterized by competition that, in the absence of a supranational law enforcement agency, contains a potential for war. To a certain extent the international society of states is anarchy, international law merely a codification of the behaviour of the major powers, which they modify or change at will. It rejects the notion of what Robert Cooper has called a post-modern world where nations are bound together by common values and identity, by common interests of free trade, democracy and the rule of law, solve their differences through peaceful arbitration and have thus abolished the use of force as a political means. This basically European post-modern state of affairs was only made possible by the American power umbrella. We have already seen increasing inter-European competition in the wake of the cold war. My prediction is that it will increase as the US further withdraws its troops from European soil and disinterests itself with European security matters.

So – the basic assumption for my remarks this afternoon is that there is still need for a capacity to use or threaten to use limited force in peacetime in order to prevent, contain and dissolve conflict and avoid war. Now, you may call this a truism at a time and age where presently Norwegian and other European units are engaged together under American leadership in multinational peace enforcement operations and war on terror in the Balkans, in Afghanistan and Iraq. The rhetoric that has surrounded these operations has, however, perhaps unintentionally, contributed to the creation of the post-modern myth of a western security community that stand united in the pursuit of a common goal of peace, democracy, the rule of law and free trade. That war is something that from now on only takes place on the backward periphery of the developed and enlightened western world. We have finally solved the problem of war in our part of the world. Therefore it is now our moral duty and obligation to bring our values, civilization and peace, our way of life, to these troubled corners of the world. I mention this only because; in my view this idea is wrong and that if it is allowed to take hold it will have dire consequences for our ability to build and maintain a navy relevant to and sufficient for Norwegian requirements. It is wrong because it overlooks the fact that there are geostrategic reasons of great power politics and little else that motivates the heavy western military involvement in the Middle East, central and south Asia. This is underscored by the fact that we do not see similar involvement in for example Darfour or Rwanda and that democracy is not important as long as the ruling scoundrel is our scoundrel. It is also wrong because it underplays or minimizes the rivalries that actually exist among many of the nations within the so-called western world. And the reason why Norwegian units take part in these operations is not primarily because we want to spread the ideas of democracy and the rule of law – there are better and more efficient ways to do that – but because we cannot afford to distance ourselves too far from the only remaining superpower in the world, the dominating naval power in our adjacent seas, the United States of America. The deployment of Norwegian frigates, fast patrol boats and submarines to the Mediterranean is thus a classical example of naval diplomacy in practice. I will come back to that.

My subject matter, in case you thought I had forgotten - is how navies are used to this end, how the coastal state of Norway may be subject to limited use of naval force by others and how Norway can make limited use of naval force, in the pursuance and protection of Norwegian national interests. I will base my remarks on James Cable’s definition of what he calls Gunboat Diplomacy.

“Gunboat Diplomacy is the use or threat of limited naval force, otherwise than as an act of war, in order to secure advantage, or to avert loss, either in the furtherance of an international dispute or else against foreign nationals within the territory or the jurisdiction of their own state”.

Why is this important? Well as a coastal state occupying round 50% of Europe’s Atlantic coast, (If you count Svalbard) the adjacent sea areas rich on petroleum and fish, as a rim land to the transcontinental major power Russia, Norway is in a strategically exposed position. And with her long and exposed coast Norway is, as Norwegians have experienced before in their history, readily accessible to the use of Gunboat Diplomacy by any Naval Power that may see its interests served by putting pressure on her. If and when that happens, Norwegian authorities do well to recognize it for what it is, and even better to have thought through how, if at all, it could be countered. Also, with the responsibilities for the house holding of rich natural resources off her coast and in the adjacent sea areas, which Norway, by a whim of nature and the development of the International Law of the Sea, has to shoulder, she does well to understand how best to employ her navy and Coast guard in support of her political goals and interests at sea.

Naval diplomacy in general

Geoffrey Till, who was guest speaker here in Ulvik two years ago, in his latest book on Sea Power, makes the point that although naval diplomacy is as old as civilisation, neither Mahan nor Corbett or the other classical theoreticians of Sea Power had much to say on the subject. Most of the literature on Naval Diplomacy has in fact been written after world war two by people like the U.S. Navy’s admiral Stansfield Turner who, when he took command of the US Navy War College rearranged the curriculum to make space for the study of the demands of Naval Presence alongside that of Naval Warfare. The Soviet admiral Gorshkov also wrote at length on the subject and in addition, as chief of the Soviet Navy, demonstrated in practice, how the navy could be an instrument of the policy of the state, an important aid to diplomacy in peacetime. In Post Cold War naval doctrine “Naval Force in Support of Diplomacy” figures prominantly in western navies. The US Navy doctrine, “Forward from the Sea”, typically contains the following passage: “Naval forces are an exceptional instrument of American foreign policy. From conducting routine port visits to nations and regions that are of special interest, to sustaining larger demonstrations of support to long standing regional security interests . . . our naval forces advance US diplomatic initiatives overseas”.

The relationship between the fighting power of a navy and its political and diplomatic potential is neither direct nor proportional. In naval diplomacy the simple tactical/technical force balance is much less relevant than in war fighting. Rather, it is the balance between basic values and primary interests in a situation under development, and how the parties involved assess them, which determines the balance of strength between them. A main point, therefore, that I want to bring across to you, is that as long as we are talking about naval diplomacy as opposed to regular war fighting, the relevance and usefulness of Norway’s naval forces are not proportional to their fighting power. Whether, or to what extent, the threat or use of force may produce the intended results depends on the balance of interests rather than upon the balance of forces between opponents, that is on the ability and will of the parties involved to take risk and endure costs. What determines the usefulness of ones naval forces is, in other words, the balance between the interests at stake on both sides as seen by the parties involved. If basic values and key interests of one side are at stake, while for the other side it is only about marginally improving ones situation, the former could benefit from use or

threat of force even if the forces of his opponent were superior to his, in strictly military terms. The famous Cod War between Britain and Iceland is a case in point.

Applied on Norwegian conditions this explains why it in fact not only has meaning, but actually is of overriding importance to peace and stability in our part of the world, that Norway establishes a Naval Presence in Northern Waters even if the units we deploy are technically, tactically or operationally inferior to the other navies that may operate and have interests in the region. And the signal is reinforced if regular Norwegian Naval presence were to be maintained at the expense of high priority international operations that Norway was under pressure from her allies to contribute too. On the other hand, a lack of Naval Presence over time, or the lack of political will to allocate the resources that are needed to exploit the full potential of the Coast Guard, could contribute to creating the impression that Norwegian control with the activities and management of the resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone is not a basic value or of primary interest to Norwegian authorities. Put under pressure, the chances that Norway would stand by her claims, if necessary by use of force, can be discounted.

If naval forces are to matter in a dispute, they must be there. They must be present on the arena of the dispute. They must be there, either physically in order to observe, and report or to intervene, in one way or another, in a situation under development. Or they must be there mentally, inside the heads of the decision makers, as a “fleet in being” in a way that will make an actor change his behaviour in the desired direction as a result of his perception of what kind of problems the naval forces of his opponent may instigate if he did not.

To Norway with her extended coastline and adjacent sea areas under Norwegian jurisdiction that are six times the size of her land territory, round two billion square kilometres, the need to be present on the arena of dispute and the fact that in Naval Diplomacy the balance of interests are more important than the balance of forces, adds up to numbers of units being relatively more important than quality in terms of the fighting power of those units. This, however, is not new. What is new is that Norway, at a time when she is richer than she has ever been before in her history, has fewer fighting ships than ever before in her fleet. That statement has; however, to be modified by the observation that never before in history has Norway had a larger and more potent Coast Guard. Never the less, even if the quality and fighting power of each unit of today’s navy is considerably better than before, we have not been able to change neither the laws of physics that dictate that a ship can only be in one place at the time. Neither have we been able to reduce the physical length of our coastline, even if modern telecommunications, larger weapons and sensor ranges and higher transit speeds have reduced its length in metaphorical terms.

I said that the balance of interests is more important than the balance of forces when you want to determine whether and to what extent the navy can contribute to diplomacy or foreign policy. What then constitutes the basic values or the primary interests of a state? Apart from the basic security of its inhabitants – and even that is open for discussion as to what it means and what it takes – what a state regards as its basic values and primary interests will always be a matter of judgement. If you examine why a state regards one interest as more important and basic than another, the explanations offered seldom stand up to analytical assessment. And interests and values cannot be measured or weighed simply because they have no objective existence. Instead they are defined through declarations of purpose or demonstrations of purpose and will by concrete physical action and engagement. The primary interests and basic values of a state are thus subjective quantities, the American strategist Edward Luttwak

reminds us, and their status and value are either subjectively acknowledged or rejected by other states. Luttwak offers an illustrative example from the cold war: The Soviet Union expressed control over the East European satellite states as a basic value. And the invasion of Czechoslovakia was a concrete Soviet expression of this. By not intervening, the US accepted as a fact that such control was indeed a basic Soviet value. Likewise, the US expressed on numerous occasions that its support to the defence of Western Europe as a basic value also included Berlin. And when The Soviet Union challenged the US over Berlin, that basic value was confirmed both in word, President Kennedy's famous "Ich bin ein Berliner" 1963 and in deed, the air bridge to Berlin 1958.

On the other hand, by not reacting or by demonstrably or visibly reducing the width and intensity of ones engagement, a state may signal that what used to be a basic value and a primary interest now is nothing more than an ordinary value and one of many interests. What one gains by such redefinition, is of course that it becomes possible to avoid the costs and risks associated with acting, without the loss of face. The price one pays for the devaluation is loss of power and influence over the issue in question. Because, with the exception of ones own territory, including the territorial waters, which integrity in itself constitutes a basic value and a primary interest, any exterritorial value or interest, for example in the various Zones outside Norwegian territorial waters but under Norwegian jurisdiction, must be protected and secured through active engagement. A state enjoys power and influence outside own borders only to the extent that it engages itself actively. The problem is that active engagement contributes to reduced flexibility and room for diplomatic manoeuvre. Total engagement means total lack of flexibility, total flexibility, on the other hand, leads to total impotence. And if you are visibly absent in an area of primary interest to you, you may have to defend it by use of force.

The preamble to the Falklands war in 1982 is a good example of how the employment or rather lack of employment, of force can have consequences totally out of proportion with their fighting value. Argentina's dictator General Galtieri observed how Britain systematically reduced her presence on the islands. And when she decided to pull back home the patrol vessel HMS Endurance, Galtieri got the proof he was looking for. If he only acted decisively and established a fait accompli on the islands, the chances that the British would do anything other than protest, were minimal. We got an unnecessary war. As Luttwak says: In the absence of visible engagement nothing can be defended other than with the use of force. (We do well, by the way, to remember this statement, when we thoughtlessly, in pursuit of narrow economies, reduce the presence of Norwegian armed Forces in Finnmark and Northern Troms). But to Mrs. Thatcher, the defence of the Falklands constituted a basic value that justified going to war, if necessary. The problem was that the British Government, through its behaviour on the islands, had failed to convince the Argentineans that this was the case. In other words: The idea of a basic value or a primary interest has to be created inside the head of ones opponent by means of a visible and credible engagement or actions that demonstrate that: This is of overriding importance to me, and if you try to remove it from me I will defend it with all available means! A state that desist from engaging itself in a manner that contributes to creating unclarities or misunderstandings as to what constitutes that states vital interests and basic values, and thus miscalculations of risk and cost on the part of other states with interests in the area, are guilty of creating potential instability that in a given situation may increase the risk of conflict and war.

In his analysis of the political and diplomatic uses of Sea Power, Edward Luttwak distinguishes between what he calls active and latent influence.

Latent influence is a function of the tacit encouragement or deterrence of others as a result of what they think or believe the Navy can accomplish.

Active influence, on the other hand, is a function of direct and specific actions like deployment to or withdrawal from a specific area, the conduct of exercises, or the direct interference in a situation. For such actions to have the desired encouraging or deterrent effect there needs to be a relatively direct connection between political declarations on the one hand and naval actions on the other.

Again, applied on Norwegian circumstances, there is hardly any doubt that the Coast Guard, through sustained practice over many years at a high level of professionalism, has a latent influence on the will of fishermen fishing on Norwegian licence to abide by Norwegian regulations. On the other hand, it is an open question whether the Norwegian Navy during the Cold War, through the combination of its rhetoric, and its actions, contributed in any way to influence nations that operated submarines in Norwegian waters without the consent of Norwegian authorities, to stop doing so. The reason is that the Navy's declarations of the aim to bring unidentified submarines to the surface identify and then expel them, was not followed up by results.

James Cable not only made the definition of Gunboat Diplomacy that I quoted initially. He also created a system of concepts for the conduct of Gunboat Diplomacy that I find useful. The most important about these concepts, and the practical examples connected to them, is not only that they constitute a repertoire, a book of recipes for how Norway may apply Sea Power in specific situations. They also constitute a guide to understanding how the coastal state of Norway may expect to be exposed to Gunboat Diplomacy from the Naval Powers.

- Definitive use of Sea Power indicates the use of Sea Power in order to create a fait accompli, an established fact that cannot be undone, and a situation that cannot be reversed. Cable uses the example of the Altmark affair in 1940 when the British destroyer HMS Cossack entered the Jøssingfjord, against Norwegian protests, and liberated prisoners of war from the Altmark, an auxiliary to the German battleship Admiral Graf Spee. There was little Norwegian authorities could do other than protest.

- Puropseful use of Sea Power indicates the use of Sea Power in order to make the opponent change its behaviour, a state to change its policies. But it is not the use of force in itself that brings about the desired changes. Rather the use of force prompts the victim to make decisions it otherwise would not have made, or to desist from actions it otherwise would have conducted. Cable's illustrative example takes us to Iraq in 1961. That year Iraq's ruler General Kassem declared that he regarded Kuwait as integral part of Iraq. The Kuwaiti Government appealed to Great Britain for help. Shortly thereafter the carrier HMS Bulwark put ashore 600 marines, while at the same time, tanks were put ashore from a British amphibious ship. The British established a defensive line five English miles from the Iraqi border and declared that they were ready to defend the sovereignty of Kuwait. In the UN Security Council Britain declared that they harboured no hostile intentions towards Iraq, and that British units only would take action in case Kuwait were attacked but would be withdrawn the moment Kuwait's security was no longer threatened. There was no Iraqi attack. In February 1963 Kassem was ousted from power and in October the Iraqi government formally declared that they recognized Kuwait as a sovereign state.

- Catalytical use of Sea Power is, according to Cable, where Sea Power is used for more obscure purposes than hitherto discussed. A situation may arise that feels threatening, but it is difficult to ascertain what exactly the threat amounts to, and it is unclear what risks or possibilities the situation contains. But something may well happen that can only be prevented, or taken advantage of, if there are forces available at the right time and place. This is a situation where Naval Forces are particularly well suited. The ships may patrol in international waters, out of sight, but close enough to be employed at short notice. And when there is no longer a requirement they can be withdrawn as swiftly and effortlessly as they were brought in. Cable mentions the chaotic situation in the Baltic after World War One as an example. Anything might happen, and the British Government thought that the chances that the situation might develop in line with British interests would increase if the Royal Navy were present in the area. The instructions to the British fleet were deliberately vague. Little by little a situation developed whereby it appeared that it would serve British interests best if German and Russian influence in the Baltic were reduced, and consequently that Britain should support in establishing Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as independent states, which in the end became the task of the navy.

- Declaratory use of Sea Power is the use of Naval Forces to express or underline political positions or to add emphasis to political or diplomatic statements that apparently have not been well understood. The difference between declaratory use of Sea Power and simply showing the flag is admittedly vague. But it should be mentioned if only because it is so frequently used. Let me take a relatively recent local example: In the summer of 2002 Norwegian media made a lot of the fact that a Russian naval vessel operated in the Fishery Protection Zone around Svalbard. On several occasions the naval vessel manoeuvred in a way that contributed to obstructing the Norwegian Coast Guard in its attempts to inspect Russian trawlers in the area. To questions from Norwegian media the Russian Minister of Defence Sergei Ivanov declared that it was only natural that Russian naval units wanted to exercise a little away from homeport, since for the last ten years they had hardly left the jetty. It is, never the less, not unreasonable to link the presence of the Russian man-of-war off Svalbard to the Norwegian Coast Guards arrest, in April the previous year, of the Russian trawler "Chernigov" for violation of Norwegian mesh width regulations. Russia has never accepted Norwegian law as basis for Norwegian jurisdiction in the Svalbard zone. And Russian authorities protested vigorously against the arrest as representing a violation of international law. The unusual presence of a Russian naval unit may, in other words be interpreted as an expression of Russian displeasure with how Norwegian authorities treat Russian trawlers in the Svalbard fishery protection zone. In that case the naval presence is a reminder that Russian authorities do not recognize Norway's self-proclaimed rights in the Svalbard Zone. In other words; a classical example of declaratory use of Sea Power. But to the extent that the Russian protests followed up by the deployment of a Russian man of war in the Svalbard Zone, made Norwegian authorities more reluctant than before in bringing up Russian trawlers violating Norwegian regulations, we have here also an example of Purposeful use of Sea Power on behalf of Russia. Another current example of declaratory use of Sea Power is Norway's participation in the Mediterranean with frigates, submarines and fast patrol boats. By her participation, in spite of the fact that very tight budgets have forced the Norwegian navy to reduce its regular presence in North Norway, Norway sends a strong signal to her allies that: We are solidary members of NATO and of the Western security community.

Effective use of Sea Power in times of peace in support of diplomacy in a way that does not provoke actual hostilities must be based upon a complex set of matters of judgement. And the political, diplomatic and naval factors that must be weighed up against one another are

different from one situation to the next. For theory to provide a constructive contribution it is no use constructing scenarios that will never happen in practical life. Instead it may be useful to formulate a set of questions that should be asked before the decision is made to actually use Sea Power. Some of the questions that ought to be asked could sound like this:

1. What is it we want to achieve? What is the aim?

2. Are the circumstances right for definitive use of force? Is it possible to reach the aim without cooperation with the opposition, or in spite of his active resistance? Is there any object, person, place, ship etc. that may be taken, saved, protected or destroyed? If the answer is yes, can naval units do it in time before the situation is changed so that it is no longer possible or preferable or relevant, and what would the consequences be? Are they acceptable? Is it possible to establish a fait accompli? If the answers to these questions are no, there is probably no basis for use of Definitive Sea Power.

3. What about purposeful use of Sea Power? How is it possible to reduce the number of courses of action open to the opposition? How can we bring him to choose the course of action that we want him to choose? How can we block unwanted courses of action?

There are of course many more.

The use of Sea Power is always a compromise between the ideal and the possible. It has to be carried out within the boundaries of what the politicians as a minimum can accept at one end of the scale and what the navy as a maximum has the capacity to deliver at the other side of the scale. In order to strike the right balance between the two, in order that the judgement of the situation and what can be done about it can be as sound and timely as possible the quality and depth of dialogue between the political and naval leadership must be as close as possible. This is, in my view, the main reason why, in our time when armed diplomacy has seen a renaissance, the decision to integrate the HQ Defence Command and the Department of defence into one single body of leadership at the pol-mil level undoubtedly was a correct one.

Thank you for your attention!