



Where ‘spacepower’ is incubated

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Recently, while participating in a wargame, I was asked by a military officer whether today’s Space Force has the equivalent of an Air Corps Tactical School, the military institution which originally matured the modern theory of airpower.

The answer, in a nutshell, is “yes.”

The enduring importance of the Air Corps Tactical School (ACTS), in its day during the 1920s and 1930s, was to serve as a center of intellectual gravity where experts gathered to develop a *theory of victory* of how to apply power in their domain. Today, in the context of space, such a center definitely exists at the Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) Schriever Scholars and Space Horizons Task Force. Since 2014, a cadre of serving and retired spacepower advocates there have been developing a distinct school of spacepower and an associated theory of victory.

This doctrine posits that the central geopolitical struggle of the next century will be over access to and control of the vast energy and material wealth of the inner solar system. The resources of the inner solar systems (from the Moon out to the Asteroid Belt) vastly exceed those available on Earth, and would enable a society of trillions of humans and quintillions of dollars in gross World Domestic Product. Their control will undoubtedly determine who has the power to secure a future of freedom from autocracy.

Political victory in this contest will entail ensuring sufficient military presence and might for humanity to exploit these vast resources under conditions of liberty rather than under constraints imposed by a foreign power. The strategy to achieve this requires a peacetime strategic initiative to command Cis-Lunar space in order to enable all legal and non-hostile actors to have a presence, and to ensure the United States and its allies cannot be denied access to the prime locations of value and advantage.

This is protracted conflict in the form of a struggle for technological dominance. It is primarily a contest to secure relative advantage in the domain and to get to key celestial lines of navigation first and with the most capabilities. Doing so requires specific doctrine, training, technology investments, deployments and missions.

To get a sense of what this looks like, it is necessary to look to the high seas. In his day, U.S. Naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan laid out a theory of victory for the maritime domain. In Mahan’s view, victory was defined politically in terms of the relative strength of nations.

How does one achieve relative strength and advantage? Through commercial shipping and overseas possessions which enabled commercial power. How was that shipping encouraged and protected? Through a Navy, a Merchant Marine, and control of strategic geography including coaling stations, island possessions, decisive force at choke points, and great works such as the Panama Canal and ship-building yards and industry.

It required a Navy that was not limited to the “brown water” surrounding American coasts, but could range “blue waters” of the entire world to project military power against other navies on the high seas.

Victory was never conceptualized in the narrow sense of winning a war or even a specific naval battle, as important as these are.

The need for a Navy was seen to arise with commercial shipping — *not* with a need to move the Army across the ocean.

Victory was achieved *every day* when freedom of seas allowed the enrichment of the nation and a vigorous foreign policy. Such political victory, of course, depended on an ability to win decisively on the seas, but the Navy’s job transcended mere warfighting.

Equally important, naval strength depended on a broader dual-use infrastructure of seafaring expertise, shipbuilding capability, overseas possessions and ports producing economic value to support and fund a Navy, and a nation that saw itself as a seapower state.

In much the same way, today’s spacepower doctrine (sometimes called the “Bluewater School of Spacepower”) concerns itself not just with warfighting but with developing comprehensive national spacepower for the nation, and becoming a true “spacepower state” in the grand sense of the term. And, much like the doctrine of airpower before it, it is now being incubated in the halls of U.S. military strategy by a dedicated cadre of thinkers and experts.

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