Who Controls the Oceans?

In Peace times the vast waters that cover more than 70 per cent of the world's surface are open to everyone—there is complete freedom of the seas. In time of war, however, no nation has the right to claim appropriation of the sea as a whole, although circumstances frequently make it necessary for a nation or nation to exercise control over considerable portions of the ocean.

When armed conflict is raging, the nation which possesses a fleet sufficiently strong to position to utilize that fleet in five practical ways:

1. To bar from waters that are vital to its welfare the trade of its enemy.

2. To safeguard its own and friendly merchant shipping from attack on the seas lanes.

3. To deny the use of certain waters to the enemy for the transport of armed forces and supplies that would enable him to invade friendly territory or carry on a campaign overseas.

4. To deny the use of certain waters to shipping which would directly or indirectly assist the enemy by conveying to him essential commodities for his people's existence as well as warlike materials in raw or manufactured form for his fighting forces.

5. To enable it to exercise complete control of restricted waters for the purpose of effecting a landing in enemy territory or to secure the approaches to friendly harbors or fleet bases.

In addition the nations with a navy sufficiently powerful is frequently in position to carry warships by means of raiding vessels—cruisers and submarines—into distant seas that are not permanently under its control. The stronger the navy the greater the strength of the oceans that a nation can control. Which brings us to an explanation of the accompanying map. As can be seen, the oceans and seas are divided into variously colored areas—each color representing the nation which in a time of war could control that portion or portions of the ocean. The areas of these various areas is based upon the known strength of the different nations, distances as measured in cruising abilities of fleets, and positions and defenses of fleet bases.

The United States, it can be noted, is allotted more than a half of the North Pacific and a part of the South Pacific. Its control extended seaward until it meets that of Japan. Because of the great naval base at Pearl Harbor, Midway Islands, and the possibility of establishing bases in Alaska, the United States is in stronger position to control that part of the Pacific ported off to it thus gaining control. The United States' main fleet is stationed in the Pacific. The North Atlantic is divided between the United States and Great Britain. Great Britain's area of control extends down across the Atlantic, across the Indian ocean, and for a considerable distance into the South Pacific. At frequent intervals in this map are British bases from which fleets could operate successfully. The modern base at Singapore and the commonwealth of Australia and elevation of New Zealand help make Great Britain strong in the southern half of the western hemisphere.

Japan's area of control is limited to the western Pacific, because its bases all are in Japan proper or close to. The Philippines Islands and Guam are within the areas controlled by Japan. In the event of war both would be fairly easy prey to the Japanese navy.

Although Britain controls the Suez Canal and has strong defenses at Gibraltar and Malta, Italy, because of its extensive naval and air bases within easy striking distance of every point in the Mediterranean, is seen in strongest position to control that sea.

Germany is deemed strongest of all nations in the Baltic, because of its domination of the independent Baltic states. Russia, of course, is included in the Baltic Sea, that lies to its north. Its line of naval control also extends into the western part of the North Pacific by virtue of the natural harbors in eastern Siberia which would be worth no bases. Russia controls the Black Sea.

That portion of the eastern Atlantic lying off Spain, Portugal, and North Africa could be controlled by Great Britain or by other powers able to acquire bases along the coast. Among those other powers France must be taken into consideration, both because of its distances and its naval strength.

The shipping lanes of that part of the South Atlantic lying off the coast of South America could be guarded more readily by the United States.

The war expansion of oceans that are under allocated to the various sea powers would be open to much by treaty and subsidies, just as they were during the World War.