On September 20, 2004, the United States Commission on Ocean Policy presented President Bush and Congress with its final report, *An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century*, a 610-page document containing 212 recommendations for redirecting national ocean policy and reorganizing its implementation. Although the majority of commissioners on the 16-member panel were appointed by Republican political leaders, and four were appointed directly by President Bush, the report bears little resemblance to other environmental initiatives developed under the Bush Administration.

Instead of emphasizing the need for ocean policy to be guided by free-market principles that will maximize extraction of resources, the report calls for active, ecosystem-oriented management. A simple content analysis of the report’s 24-page Executive Summary reveals, for instance, that the word “steward” (or “stewardship”) appears seven times, the word “sustainable” (or “sustainability” or “unsustainable”) appears 20 times, and the word “governance” appears eight times. By contrast the word “market” appears only once (and, even in this instance, market-based incentives are noted as being one among several options available for reducing point-source water pollution).

These rhetorical calls for an ocean management regime that favors long-term stewardship over short-term profits are backed up by specific policy recommendations. For instance, the report urges that membership in the US Regional Fisheries Management Councils – which in most cases are dominated by business interests – be broadened and that their advisory committees be professionalized, with formalization of scientific qualifications and restrictions on conflicts of interest. The report urges more systematic regulation of fishing, shipping, and mining activities, while also urging that consideration
of marine impacts be integrated into watershed development regulations. In the chapter on global ocean policy, the report stresses the US’ international responsibility and the need to work cooperatively with international organizations and foreign governments. US participation in international treaties is encouraged and the report specifically calls for US accession to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

**So, what’s going on here?**

The “green” nature of *An Ocean Blueprint* should not be overstated. The report still maintains an instrumentalist perspective from which nature is valued for its benefits to humanity rather than as a good in itself. For instance, the first chapter of the report is devoted to recounting the ocean’s “assets” and the contribution that it makes to the US economy (over $117 billion annually and over 2 million jobs). Although non-quantifiable assets are also noted (the Executive Summary states, “There are even more important attributes that cannot be given a price tag, such as global climate control, life support, cultural heritage, and the aesthetic value of the ocean with its intrinsic power to relax, rejuvenate, and inspire”), here too the reasoning is instrumentalist in that the ocean is seen as a provider of benefits to society rather than as a good in itself.¹ Finally, it remains to be seen whether the White House will embrace the report and its recommendations. It may be indicative that, although the Commission included a number of prominent and well connected business leaders, former elected officials, and

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¹ Interestingly, in the preliminary report, the sentence in the Executive Summary that most resembled this one, although also instrumentalist, contained a touch of non-rational poetry. It read, in its entirety, “We also love the oceans for their beauty and majesty, and for their intrinsic power to relax, rejuvenate, and inspire” (United States Commission on Ocean Policy, *Preliminary Report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy: Governors’ Draft*, April 20, 2004, [http://www.oceancommission.gov/documents/prelimreport/welcome.html](http://www.oceancommission.gov/documents/prelimreport/welcome.html), p. ix). When crafting the final report five months later, however, the Commission’s authors excised the romantic references to love, beauty, and majesty and replaced them with references to rational, if non-monetizable, benefits such as global climate control and life support.
retired military officers, the White House welcomed *An Ocean Blueprint* with just a terse, one-paragraph news release. Rather than endorsing (or even commenting on) the Commission’s recommendations, the White House news release simply reviewed the Bush Administration’s own record on ocean policies, including its implementation of “an improved, market-based system to help restore our fisheries and keep our commercial and recreational fishing industries strong.” The release ended with a statement noting that “[the] Administration looks forward to building on [its] initiatives assisted by the work of the Commission,” a gentle but firm assertion that the White House did not see the Commission’s report as a signal that it should change direction and that the overall orientation of national ocean policy would continue to be determined by the White House.

Notwithstanding these caveats, *An Ocean Blueprint* is surprising for its support of active stewardship, especially considering its association with an administration known for its suspicion of environmental regulations and international treaties. Indeed, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), an environmental group that rarely has kind words for the Bush Administration, issued two news releases supporting the Commission’s findings and as well as publishing an open letter to President Bush urging him to implement the Commission’s recommendations.

- What’s going on? [answer in ocean, but also in global pol. Econ., global governance, global regulation, competition, etc.]

- Relative progressivism in ocean is occurring because of its location amidst a confluence of forces that are meeting as global capitalism expands.

- Go back historically
- Medieval view of ocean. Barrier beyond land [show mappamundi]. In some systems, though, incorporated as part of the world-system (contrast Micronesian, Indian Ocean, and Mediterranean examples).

- Rise of mercantilism ca. 1500. Suddenly ocean emerged as important space in-between (ocean moved from margin to center). Very valuable for system (since economy was all about extracting resources from distant locations and trading over long distances) but value came from its being empty. This created a challenge for global society: how is a place valuable when it’s empty (especially in light of medieval metaphysical beliefs)? [show succession of maps].
  o First two (texture, ships & animals): stuff in way and doesn’t highlight land as space of society. Faded by early 17th century.
  o Next three (rhumb lines, commerce routes, curved oceans): These three are transitional: Ocean isn’t developable & enclosable space of nature/society, as in previous round of representations (texture, ships, fish), but it also isn’t devoid of substance. It’s more a space of routes. Rose and fell between 1600 and 1750
  o Next two (explorers’ routes, zodiac): Ocean is (respectively) space of past society and of mathematical navigation. Now it can be turned into space truly without substance, but still has a certain importance. These grow during 18th century, but fade during 19th to create empty ocean we see on maps today.

- Similar dilemma in regulating the ocean: How do you give countries the power to clear obstacles from ocean without moving toward dividing the ocean into pieces (which would get in the way of transport)? Example in Tordesillas.

- Industrial capitalism. Production-in-place moved to forefront of society. Ocean became ideologically marginal again (although retained importance). Ocean became unbounded, uncivilized antithesis against which states became defined as bounded and civilized (and places where you could invest and make money through control of property). Two trends: a) romantics highlighted ocean as space beyond rationality and reason (ocean novels); b) state wished away ocean as space that stood outside civilization and thus could potentially interfere with commerce. This was expressed both through abolition of piracy and, later through ads [show Merrill Lynch and Concert ads]

- We now have two key factors that – flowing from global political economy – have contributed to the current context that led to Republicans producing the Blueprint: 1) Ocean as emotional space beyond rationality (potentially even with intrinsic worth beyond its utility, although that’s not in Blueprint), and 2) Desire to protect the ocean from market and political mechanisms that could lead to possession (which in turn would interfere with its construction as a smooth surface for commercial and military movement).
Third component is that as these two things were happening, the ocean was increasingly becoming a space where individual places had value (for fish, minerals, etc.) and this created a drive to parcel out ocean to states for development. Until recently this occurred only very close to shore, so, so long as transit rights through coastal waters were preserved, there were few problems.

Now, though, extraction has intensified, and has spread to distant waters, to the point where some sort of regulation is needed, both to prevent overexploitation and to prevent a dynamic where extraction → territorialization → interference with movement. Three options. 1) is parceling ocean to states [Show World Lakes]. Not an option because a) it would imply extension of state sovereignty which could interfere with transit rights, b) historic construction of ocean as beyond states, and c) fish move. 2) is world government. Not an option either, as this would interfere with capitalist competition and sanctity of state system (U.N. would have independent funding mechanism and its own production). 3) build an ethic of stewardship that builds on ocean’s place outside state system, thereby creating an environment where capitalists and states moderate their behavior so as to preserve the ocean’s many uses. That’s where Blueprint comes in.

Good or bad? Sincere or greenwash? I won’t say it’s all bad. Ocean environmentalism is a good thing. But, it’s important to understand how different parties involved might want to take the agenda in different directions. Also important for finding allies (e.g. US military vs. Reagan miners on Law of the Sea). Site of ill fit → potential site of change.